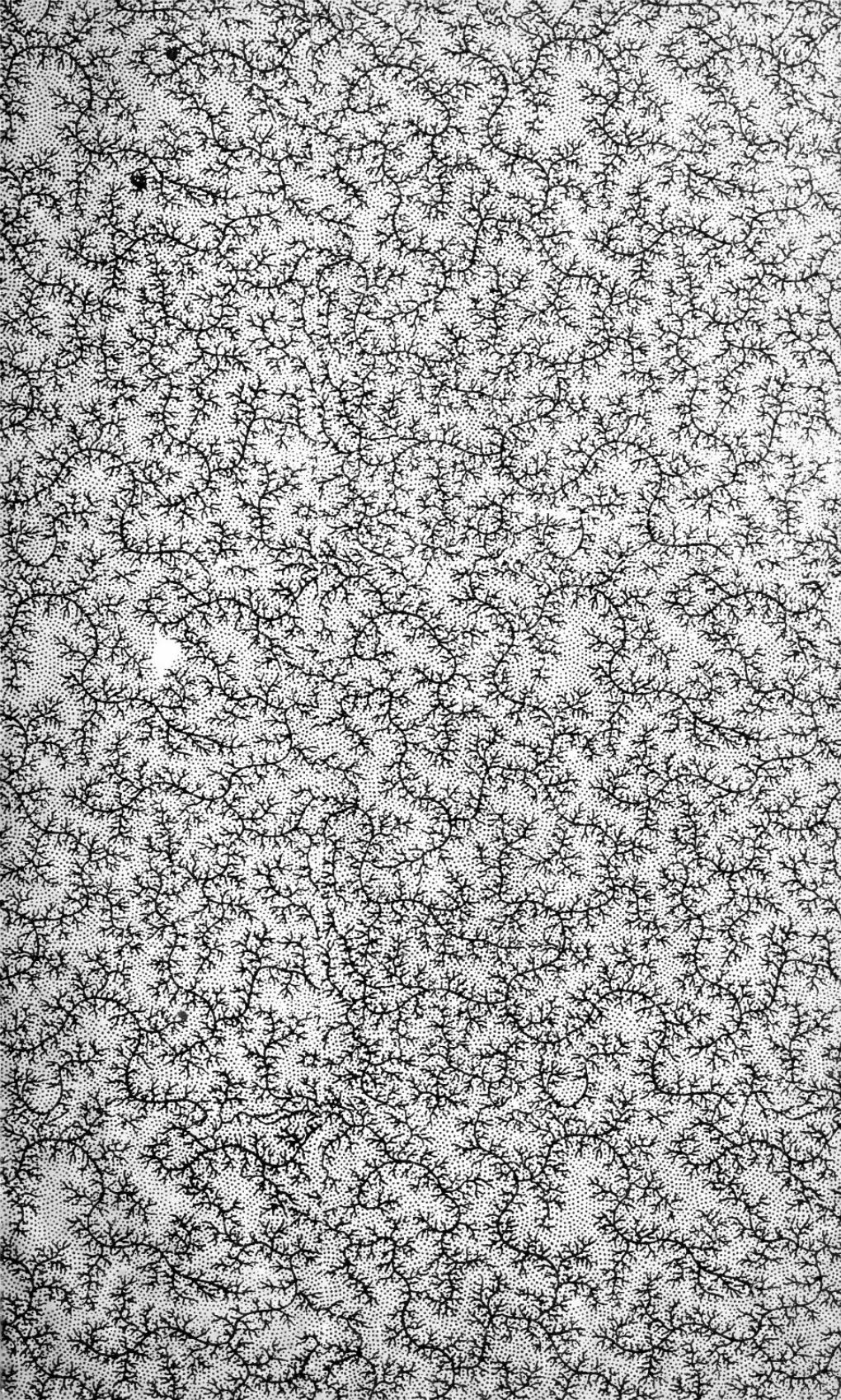


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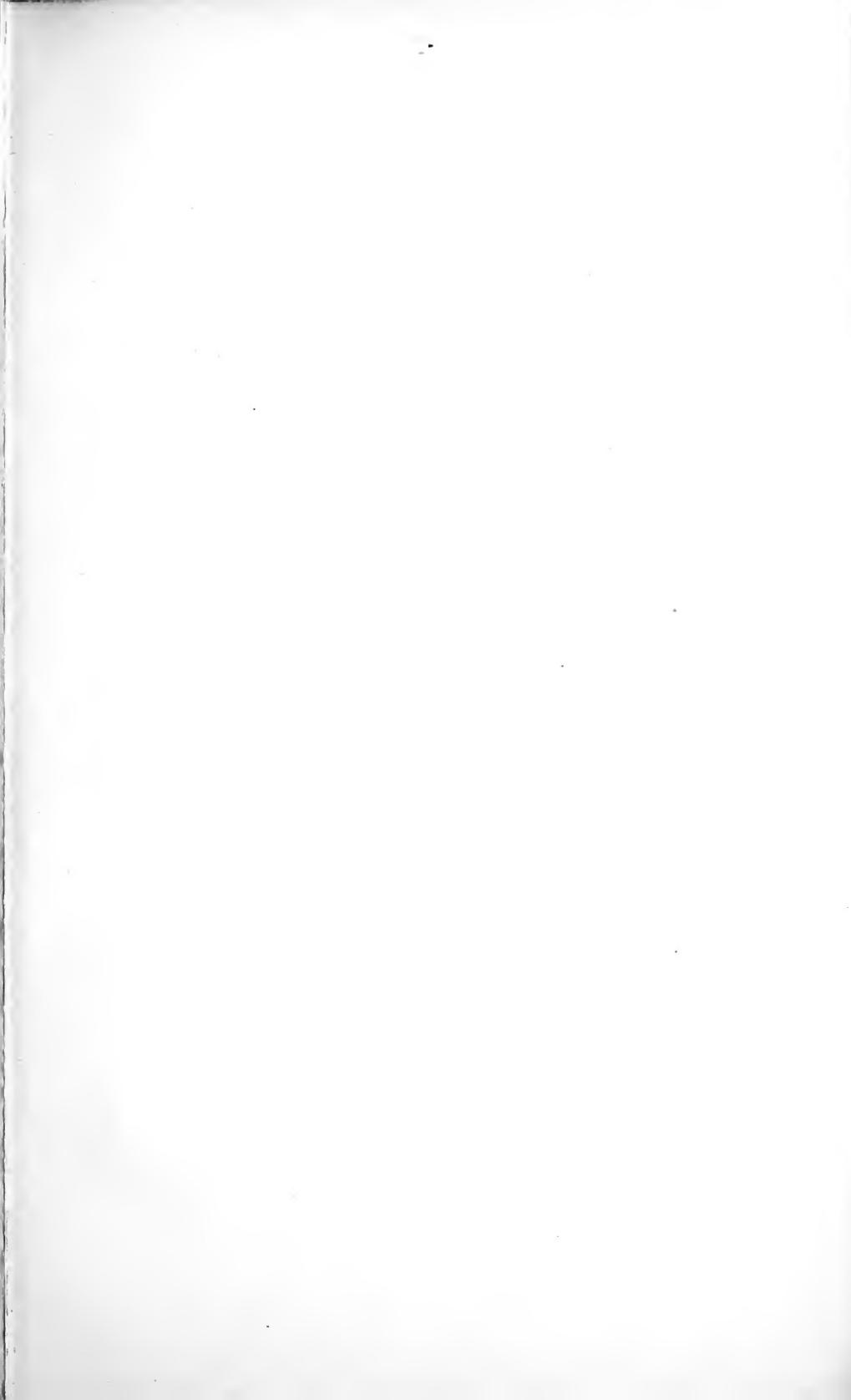
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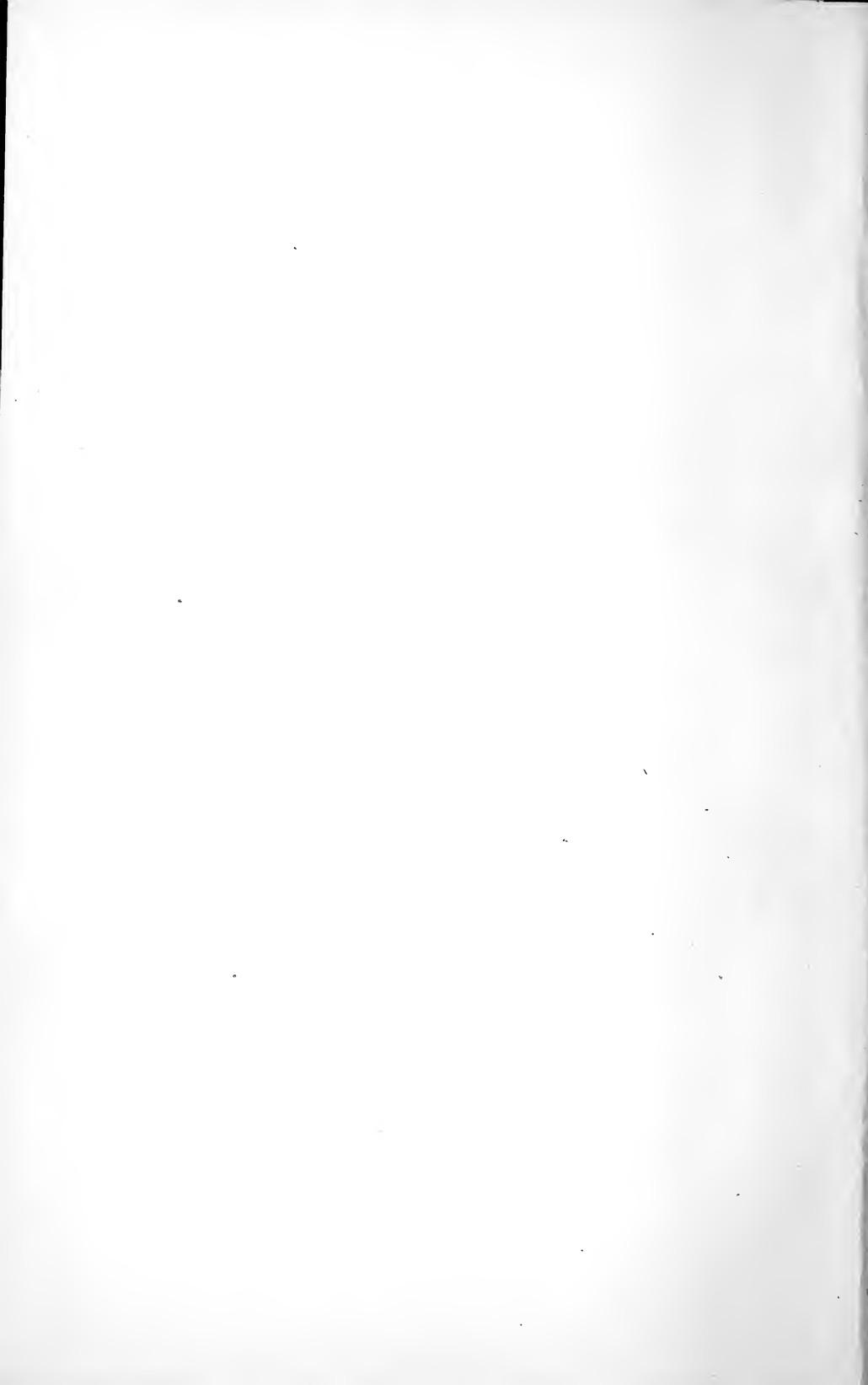
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“LEAD ME

•

TO

• THE ROCK.”

BY THE

REV. T. W. HOOPER, D.D.

“Remember the words which I spake unto you while I was yet
present with you.”

39538X

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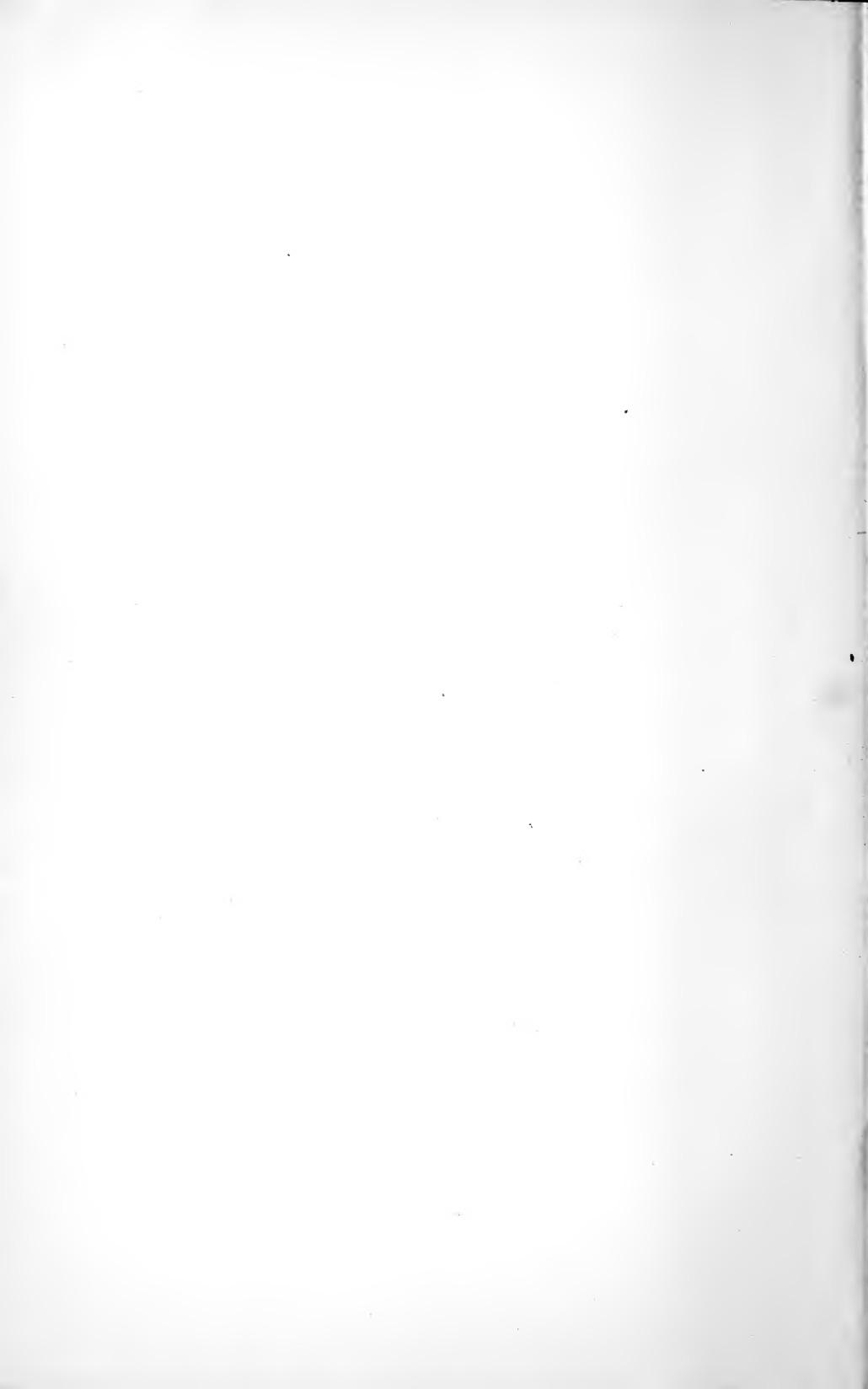
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TO THE
BELOVED PEOPLE IN VIRGINIA AND ALABAMA

AMONG WHOM,
FOR MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS, AMID SUNSHINE AND
SHADOWS, IT HAS BEEN HIS BLESSED PRIVILEGE
TO LABOR IN THE GOSPEL,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY THEIR
OLD PASTOR.



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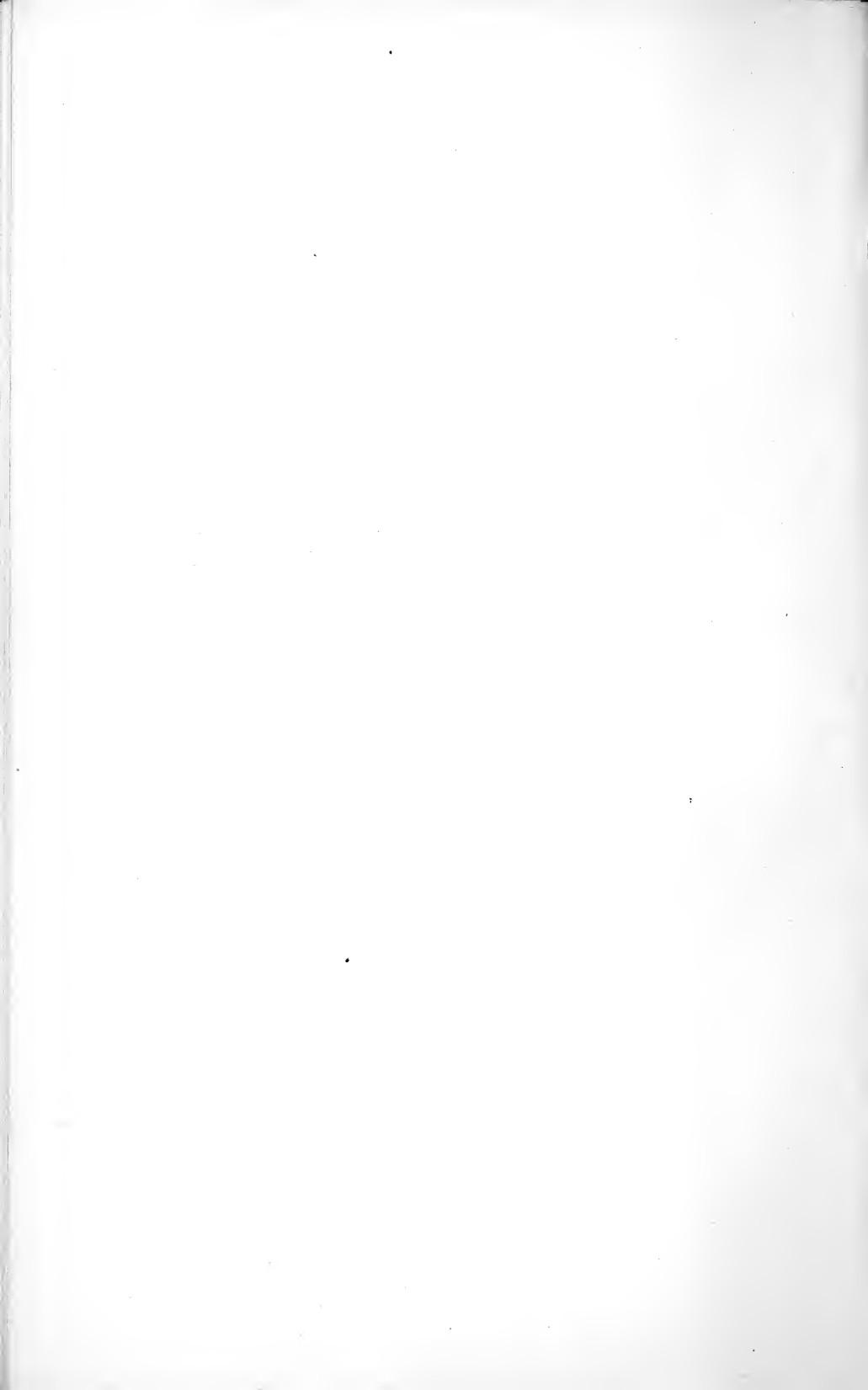
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PART I.

LEAD ME TO THE ROCK.



LEAD ME TO THE ROCK.

DAVID was "a man after God's own heart," but David was a man of varied experience. In his psalms we find evidence of the fact that he was not always on the hill-top, but often down in the valley. In the sixty-first psalm we find a prayer which will well express the thoughts and feelings of all saints: "From the end of the earth I will cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

What better prayer than that can a Christian use when he is beset by doubts as to his acceptance with God? It is not every Christian who has such an "assurance of hope." Satan so often "changes himself into an angel of light," and thus leads the soul to hope for salvation before it has actually "cast itself upon the mercy of God in Christ," that there are many who cannot truly say, "I know that I have passed from death unto life."

Satan has such a subtle way of infusing spiritual galvanism into dead souls, and thus seeming to "quicken them into a newness of life," while it is only spasmodic and temporary, instead of lasting and eternal, that what an old minister once said is true: "Some people's doubts are worth more than other people's certainties." The fact that they are doubtful implies a deep consciousness of sins, and this is always needed before we can appreciate and apply the infinite fullness of Christ. There is a genuine "assurance of hope," but the counterfeit of the true coin is in wide circulation. This has a tendency too often to weaken individual effort and to cramp the energies of the soul. It has a tendency to stir up spiritual pride and to lead to a forgetfulness of God as the only source of strength. Paul could say at one time, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." And at another time he said, "For when I am weak, then am I strong."

If, then, God is leading you along through doubts and darkness, and you are often brought to wonder whether you are a Christian or not, do not be discouraged and disheartened. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Let that be your daily

prayer. If your doubts are founded upon a deep sense of indwelling sin and personal unworthiness; if you have them only when you look at your own heart, and still feel that Christ is able and willing to save and waiting to save, struggle on, pray on, trust on. God is with you. The Spirit still dwells in your heart, convincing you of sin and speaking to you of that "blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Let the good Spirit lead you to that rock, and though your life shall be "one day," which to your own mind shall be "neither day nor night," but only twilight, yet "at evening-time it shall be light." These shadows that now come over you shall be swept away, and on the "Delectable Mountains" you shall stand in the evening of life and look out upon "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Again, you feel that you have lost much of your former love for Christ and for holy things. Under the pressure of worldly cares, or the fascination of wordly pleasure, you feel conscious of a real spiritual declension. Instead of growing in grace, you are conscious of having grown in worldliness and vanity. Religion seems to be gloomier than it once appeared. Religious worship is more tiresome.

The Bible is not so pleasing and profitable. You do not read it as a pleasure, but from a sense of duty. Secret prayer, this closest communion with God, is not a delight, as it used to be, but it is only the constraint of conscience that forces you, in a careless and perfunctory way, to hurry over your stereotyped form of petitions and thanks before lying down to rest or before entering on the unknown duties and trials of a new day.

And thus, instead of widening the mark that separates you from the world, you have been constantly narrowing it and allowing it to be obliterated. You know that if a stranger were to judge by your daily walk and conversation he would never suppose that you were a member of the Church. You know yourself that you are not "showing forth the beauty of holiness" by a consistent life. You know that you are full of passions and principles, and follow habits and practices that are unbecoming a Christian, one professing godliness, a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus.

If you could see a duplicate of yourself, your own character and actions in another body, you would never suppose that such a person was professing to live under the injunction "Occupy till I come," or "Be ye holy, for I am holy," or "Ab-

stain from all appearance of evil," or "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

It is evident, then, that you are cold and careless as regards your duty as a Christian. And yet you need not despair, for there is still hope for you. The same sunshine that once melted your heart is seeking to penetrate and enlighten your soul. The same God whose blood once washed away your sins is still ready to pardon, and his blood is as precious as ever. It still cleanseth from all sin. The same Spirit who once led you to Jesus is waiting to lead you to him again. Then let your prayer be, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," and God will hear you and answer you, and "restore unto you the joy of [his] salvation."

Or, perhaps, while you have felt thus cold and careless, neglectful and worldly-minded, now you feel penitent and sad; you mourn over your departure from primitive piety, and long to feel a return of those spiritual joys. Your heart grows sad at the memory of your sins and your forgetfulness of God. You have come to yourself, and are amazed at the distance you have drifted down the current while in this worldly dream. You are depressed in spirit, and while you resolve to repent

and reform, you break these resolutions. When you would do good, evil is present with you. The law that is in your members wars against the spirit. The spirit seems to be willing, but the flesh is weak.

You forsake one sin, and then another; you leave off one bad habit, and then another. You try to read God's Word, but your mind wanders. You try to speak of your troubles to some Christian friend, but before you are aware of it an unholy diffidence leads you to change the conversation. You try to pray, but even on your knees the thoughts will wander and the heart does not feel. The Spirit seems unwilling to help your infirmities and teach you how to pray. And so, with Paul, in a similar experience, you cry out, "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." "Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me." "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." "Cast me not away

from thy presence ; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." Let this be your prayer, and God will hear you. Let these be your petitions, and God will answer you, and enable you with Paul to say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." He will lead you to that rock, and you will find that Christ is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Again, God has sent on you various afflictions. For a long time you have been suffering with sickness, and, like Job, God has laid his hand heavily upon you. At times you feel well, and the world seems to smile in beauty all around you. The warm blood flows healthfully in your veins, and it is a real pleasure to live in this beautiful world which a Father's love has made for us to dwell in. You enjoy the society of friends, and take delight in ministering to the wants of your household. Life, with all its business and enjoyments, its loves and friendships, its sweet sympathies and charities, is really a pleasure. You love to live, and you enjoy life as a blessing sent and continued of God, the giver of all good.

But most of the time there is sickness somewhere about your body. The blood becomes hot and feverish. The temples throb with anguish. The

whole nervous system becomes disordered, and with every noise there is a convulsion and a jar, as if the whole physical system were dissolved into quivering, nervous and trembling muscles.

This sickness of the body reacts upon the mind and heart. That intimate sympathy which exists between them is aroused, and you look out upon the world through a colored and distorted medium. The sunshine looks dark, and pleasures seem to stagnate into pestilential pools. Friendships are called in question, suspicions are aroused, gloom and melancholy depress your spirits, and you feel that you are a burden to the world, and life is a burden to yourself.

Under this curious depression fancy is aroused, and before you know it there are doubts in your mind as to the goodness and justice and mercy of God. These doubts clear away, and their very existence causes you to doubt your acceptance in the Beloved. Religious melancholy succeeds, and then hopeless gloom settles down upon your soul.

Is it thus that you have been afflicted? Has your heavenly Father sent sore trials upon your health, and thus upon your happiness? "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Let that be your prayer. God may be only leading you through

much tribulation into the kingdom. He may be only causing you to trust more to him who is the Physician of souls. The Psalmist said, "It was good for me that I was afflicted." If earth had no pains and sufferings we could never appreciate the joys and the rest of heaven. But Paul says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Perhaps God has caused some of my readers to endure the loss of loved ones. It may be a recent bereavement, or the grass may be growing upon their graves; but, recent or remote, you tread lightly around them. You miss their well-remembered voices, their kindly greetings, their loving smiles. There is a great vacancy in your heart which this earth can never fill. You hide away your grief from the eyes of the world, and yet deep down in the soul there is a little slab, and on it is written, "Sacred to the memory." No other heart can see that monument which your love has erected, but there, all alone with your own soul, you weep bit-

ter tears when you realize the fact that you will never see them again in the flesh. The heart may be very sad while the face is wreathed with smiles, and there is many a silent grief that is rankling in the soul that seems freest from sorrow. Every true heart has a graveyard in itself, where are buried forms that we once loved and hopes that we once cherished.

But if God has taken away your loved ones, he has done it for your own good. He may wish only to draw you more closely to himself. He may have intended only thus to teach you to "set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth." Do not grieve with a secret and silent sorrow over the memory of those whom you have loved and lost. Let your prayer be, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." If it be answered, you will find comfort and consolation in the sympathizing heart of a suffering Saviour. Learn to prize the rod that smites, and you will find it the rod of a friend, not of an enemy—the rod of reproof, not that of anger.

Last of all, some of you are warned by the gray hairs that mantle your brow, and by the furrows where care has traced its history of sadness and sickness and sorrow, that you will soon be passing

away. The tottering step, the trembling hand, the bent form, the dimmed eye, the deafened ear, all remind you that soon "the silver cord will be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken." You look over the changing past. You remember its seasons of joy and sorrow, of light and shadow, of holiness and sin. You remember the many loved ones who have gone before you. You call back the merry days of childhood, the bounding hopes of youth, the stern realities of manhood. The snows of these accumulated years have frosted your head and their suns have beamed softly into your heart. You look forward to meet the great unknown, hastening so rapidly to meet you, and while you cannot tell what a day may bring forth, you are obliged to feel that you are almost there.

Dear old pilgrim ! Weary traveler through this weary world, let me give you "a word in season for him that is weary." "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Let that be your daily, constant prayer, and then will be verified these words of the old hymn :

"E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

As regards all these afflictions and trials and disappointments of life, learn a lesson from the deer. When the weather is cool and pleasant, and the brooks are babbling in every glen, the deer will feed in the lowland. He grazes in the valleys, and drinks from the streams that flow in all directions. In times of rain every leaf is a little cup of water from which he may slake his thirst. But let the sun shine bright and hot. The ground is parched and burning. The little streams dry up. The clouds send down no rain. Under such troubles the deer, with unerring instinct, will climb the mountain, and away off in some shady nook, some sequestered glen, he goes to some familiar spring, and there from its cool and limpid waters he drinks his fill and is satisfied.

So should it be with the Christian. In ordinary times he may derive comfort and consolation from the common scenes of life. He may drink in joy from human friendship and love. He finds daily blessings to fill him with daily delight.

But when God withdraws his countenance, and

lays his afflicting hand upon him ; when his piety is cold, and his faith is weak, and his spiritual strength is wasted ; when sickness comes upon him, and death deprives him of those he loves, and seems ready to call him hence to be no more ; when, under all these combining influences and temptations and environments, the earth seems like a barren desert, and the very sky becomes as burnished brass above him, then let his prayer be, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,” and, guided by the spirit of all grace, let him climb the mountain of God’s grace and mercy. And if he does, away up on that mountain he will find the smitten rock of Horeb, and there he may drink of that gushing fountain, of which if a man drink he shall never thirst.

“How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe,
I have fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe;
How often, when trials like sea-billows roll
Have I hidden in thee, thou Rock of my soul !”
“Hiding in thee, hiding in thee, thou blest
'Rock of Ages,' I'm hiding in thee.”

PART II.

THE SHADOW OF THE ROCK.

THE SHADOW OF THE ROCK.

"As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."—

ISA. 32:2.

IT is generally conceded that the most of Isaiah has both a primary and a secondary meaning. His prophecies, primarily, refer to the then-existing nations and kingdoms of the earth. Sometimes they refer to some person or to some event of coming history. Sometimes the reference is plain and unmistakable, leaving no room for doubt. But in other cases, while this primary allusion is manifest, there is also a secondary and higher allusion to spiritual events that are far off in the distant future. While his prophetic mind would rest for a moment on these transitory things of time and sense, there would be an evident passing on from these to the more important and more mysterious realities of that other and better "kingdom which is not of this world." While he may sometimes speak of the peace and glory of the kingdom of Israel, it is only to go on, by a natural transition, to that other king-

dom, which is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

It is this double sense that belongs to the text and context. “Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.” This has a primary reference to the good king Hezekiah and the princes he would gather around him. And just so it is with the succeeding clause. Under his merciful and benignant reign, “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” But there is also a higher reference to the richer blessings that would come with the advent of Jesus Christ our Lord. He was to be a king that should reign in righteousness. In the highest spiritual sense he was to be that man who should be “as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.” He was to be “as rivers of water in a dry place.” He was to be “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

The mere figure itself is too plain to need any explanation, and yet it does require some experience to appreciate its comprehensive beauty. I was told by a traveler that he never saw its peculiar aptness until he traveled across the plains of New

Mexico. For days together it was impossible for them to travel in the intense heat of an almost vertical sun. The sand was so hot that it would blister the feet, and the glare of the tropical sun was almost intolerable. "And now," said he, at the close of one of these marches, "this text would come into my mind: 'As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' There are such rocks in the desert, and when, almost exhausted with intense heat, we sat down or fell down in the shadow of these great rocks, no one can imagine the exquisite sense of rest and refreshment that would come over our weary bodies and spirits. I was not a Christian," he said, "but that text would come into my mind, and I knew there must be something in the religion of Jesus Christ if he was as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

It will be my object, then, to show that there is something in this religion of Jesus; that there are real, practical truths of comfort and consolation in this blessed gospel; that in many ways and in a most blessed sense Jesus stands to-day as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

It is hardly worth while to say that this world is a land of weariness. We have all felt it to be so in this inner consciousness of ours where the soul

itself must find its habitation and its home. Apart from the fact that the true Christian will be ever sighing for "the land that is very far off," it is also a fact that this world is not his home. "Here we have no continuing city," but are pilgrims and strangers, traveling to one that is heavenly. We feel in all our surroundings that there is a strangeness, an unrest, a want of congeniality with these deep longings that pulsate in our souls. There is a something in this earthly environment that echoes the language of the Bible: "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest." We must feel and know that we "are dead, and that our life is hid with Christ in God." Many a time we may forget our destiny and become sinfully absorbed in the activities of human life. Many a time we may lose sight of our pilgrimage to Canaan, and settle down, like Terah, in Ur of the Chaldees. But in our holiest moments, and when we are most keenly alive to our condition and prospects, we cannot help feeling how vain and evanescent are all these things of time and sense. And then it is that we sigh for the rest, for the peace, for the holiness of heaven. And we find the foretaste, the earnest of all that in "the shadow of that rock" which stands out so bold and so high and so cool in this "weary land."

This feeling of weariness and unrest is sometimes caused by the ordinary cares of daily life. I doubt if any man ever lived who was perfectly happy. By nature some are happier than others, and there are some who have more to make them happy so far as the good things of this world are concerned. But generally there is somewhat of an equalization in the providence of God, and what are called "the good things" are sometimes more than counterbalanced by the evils that follow in their train. Thus it was with the rich man of the parable, and thus it was with Naaman. For, after recounting the riches and honorary titles of Naaman, it is added, by way of emphatic contrast, "*but he was a leper.*"

And just so it is with all of us at the present day. We have our cares and troubles, our anxieties, and sorrows. Sometimes they are like Paul's "thorn in the flesh," that was always lacerating, and sometimes they are like Peter's unbelief, that once in a while leads us to "deny the Lord," and then we must "go out and weep bitterly." Sometimes there is a care that acts like a chronic sore that is always festering, and then there are others which, like the acute pains of inflammatory rheumatism, are spasmodic and temporary, but intensely severe as long

as they last. It is said that there is “a skeleton in every house”—some domestic trouble known only to a few, but painfully humiliating to the family. There is some secret feud, some private disgrace, some family trial, that belongs only to the household. But its secrecy, and the necessity for that secrecy, make it a source of unmitigated pain and sadness. It would be a relief to have it divulged, but this cannot be done with impunity. And so it is like a family shut up in a room full of escaped gas. Its effects are killing them, and a light would purify the air, but a light would cause an explosion. And so the whole matter must be kept pent up, although it is gradually suffocating that family, and it may finally destroy all peace and joy, and perhaps blast their reputation in society.

But it does not require some great secret calamity like this to wear out the patience and to exhaust the energies of our being. We all have our little cares, our little troubles, our little anxieties, whose accumulated weight will burden our hearts. There may be a thousand shot in a pound, and yet each one has its own weight and swells the aggregate until it reaches a pound. Just so it is in these small cares. They have their weight, and together they make up a burden which is very grievous to be borne.

The accumulated cares and anxieties and disappointments of life are enough to crush the spirits of most men into hopeless gloom, and the responsibilities that gather and thicken as we advance in years are enough to burden us with future apprehension. Apart from our mere surmises and causeless anticipations of evil, there is enough of actual trouble to sadden our spirits, and if left to ourselves, in our unaided weakness, we would all say, with Job, "I am weary of my life, I would not live alway." No, there is too much vanity and vexation of spirit compressed into this short lifetime to make this world an everlasting home. And in order to be comparatively happy a man must either be a heathen stoic or, what is incomparably better, he must be an humble, trusting, submissive Christian.

For, be it remembered, it is "Jesus only" who stands "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." No human resort can give us any permanent relief. They only serve to modify the pain, and cannot eradicate and destroy it.

But see how beautifully these words chime amid all the din and confusion of every-day life. He is "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Here is a place of safety, a place where we may lay down our burden and rest in the grateful shadow

of that great rock. And when we lie down there, weary and oppressed as we may be, what exceeding great and precious promises rise up to refresh us, as water out of the rock and manna from heaven ! “Cast thy burden on the Lord and he will sustain thee.” “Fear not, I am with thee.” “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Again, how weary does this world seem to us when death has once and again entered the home circle ! How sad are our spirits under the pressure of these sore bereavements that are so familiar to us all ! We try to hide away our grief, to forget our sorrows, to lose sight of the great calamity. We would not murmur and complain, for we know that “He doeth all things well.” We try, with quiet resignation, to say from the heart, “Not my will, but thine, O Lord, be done.” We try to let “the dead bury their dead,” while in submission and in hope we “follow Jesus.” But it is hard to keep from

murmuring. It is hard to "be still and know that he is God." It is hard, very hard, to say from the heart, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." We did love them so tenderly while they were living that we cannot help mourning for them now that they are gone. The grave cannot hide their forms from our memory, and, though silent, it cannot shut out those voices that still come to us from the lips of our dead. In our dreams they still haunt us, and in our waking fancies their footsteps still startle us and their familiar faces still greet us with their accustomed smile.

Yes, they are dead, but they are not forgotten ; and the mocking phantom of our departed joys still stares us in the face with its hollow vacancy. There is a mist and a haze in the sunshine, dim by reason of our tears, and a cloud has gathered upon our souls which the sunlight itself cannot pierce. "Sacred to memory" is engraved upon their tombstone, and "sacred to memory" is engraved upon our hearts. The desolations of time may wear out these letters from the marble, but they cannot wear out these mystic letters from our hearts. Time may corrode or conceal these letters with its lichen and its moss, but the mellowing, hallowing, sanctifying influences of time shall only deepen and make

more legible those letters on our hearts, where what was so dear to us is buried.

But when we “come to Jesus” with the burden of such a grief, see how we find him “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also ; knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope : and hope maketh not ashamed ; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

Surely in these “words to the weary” we can find “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” And while “weeping may endure for a

night, joy cometh in the morning." It is in the shadow of this great rock that you can find rest from "the heat and burden" of this day of tribulation and sorrow.

"Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish,
Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel ;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish ;
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

Again, in the Christian life there are not only "fightings without," but there are also "fears within." The Christian is not only called upon to contend against the outward foes to peace that beset him on every side, but the conflict within is sometimes more desperate than that which is without.

"Am I a Christian?" "Can I be a child of God and an heir of glory?" "Is it possible that such a man as I can be truly converted, can be a 'new creature in Christ Jesus'?" "Is it right for me to think that I have a new heart and a right spirit?" "Is it true that I have been 'brought from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God'?" These questions must startle the most of us in these days of worldliness and vanity; and if they do not, it may be simply because we are too callous or too indifferent to think about them. We will not take

time, in the giddy whirl of business or pleasure, to "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith." Being members of the church, with no charges against us, we are content to drift on in this delusive dream until some sudden mishap shall convince us of our fatal mistake. Our hope may be merely that of the hypocrite, but we are too well content to examine into its false foundation. We do not trouble ourselves to inquire into our true state. We may have fled into a "refuge of lies," but we are content to stay there until "the hail shall sweep it away in the day of judgment."

But while these things are true of many a professing Christian, there are many who tremble under that solemn charge of the Apostle: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There are very many who have a most wholesome fear lest they should be among that great number who "have a form of godliness, but deny its power;" who "have a name to live, but are dead." There are very few of us who are not sensibly affected by these words :

" When I turn mine eyes within,
All is dark and vain and wild ;
Filled with unbelief and sin,
Can I deem myself a child ?"

We believe most firmly that if a man is a Christian he will be “kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.” But the question still remains, Am I a Christian? Have I been regenerated? Have old things passed away and all things become new to me? Have I been a recipient of the renovating, transforming, sanctifying grace of God? Is this change in my conduct a mere reformation from without, or is it the result of a genuine transformation from within? Is it a mere resolution of amendment, changing my conduct before the world, or is it a new creation of the heart, by the power of God’s Spirit, which is the germ of a new spiritual life, which is in fact and in truth the beginning of “the life everlasting”?

Here is the question of vital, paramount, practical importance. And that question must be answered before the soul can be at ease and at rest. For as long as there is doubt on this point there must be more or less of disquietude and unrest, of insecurity and alarm. And to be self-deceived on this point is to be hopelessly lost.

But the rest and quiet come when we sit down in “the shadow of that great rock in a weary land.” It is here alone that we can find “peace in believing.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ : by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.” “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.”

Again, there is another source of weariness even to those who have a comfortable hope that they are “in Christ Jesus.” The best of them are conscious of most grieved spiritual declension. They do not give up all the hope that is in them, but there is a sense of unworthiness that is very oppressive. They are so conscious of weakness of faith and declension in piety that their heads are “bowed like a bulrush.” They look back over the past with amazement and terror. They are astounded to see how many shortcomings rise up to confront them. The solemn trust committed to them has been betrayed over and over again. They have yielded to all kinds of temptations. They have done very little for the glory of God in the spread of the gospel.

They are amazed to find how often and how grievously "Jesus has been wounded in the house of his friends." They are astounded at that "evil heart of unbelief which has led them to depart from the living God." They cannot understand how it is that a professing Christian could be so utterly regardless of his duty to God, his duty to the Church, his duty to himself and his duty to his whole family, for whose religious culture he is responsible to God. His Bible has been unread, his prayers unoffered, his children uninstructed. Not even the form of "Family worship" is observed, and in his intercourse with the world he is almost as wild and reckless as the unregenerate sinner. His fellow-members regard him with suspicion. The Session is only waiting for some good evidence to convict him and cast him out, and the devil exults in the malicious thought that he can almost claim him as his own.

Surely there is not much here to encourage the hope that he can ever be reclaimed. But the grace of God once more arrests him in his giddy whirl of frivolity and sin. He has planted the seeds of worldly pleasure, and a gourd, like that of Jonah's, has shot up its tender vine, and the thick foliage spreads its ample covering around and above him.

But all at once God's "vengeance against sin" begins to rise and blaze about him. These leaves are withered and the branches are scorched until they crumble to ashes, and he is left unsheltered, unprotected, under the burning rays of that sun of God's wrath which is blazing above him.

And it is only then, when, brought under "our God as a consuming fire," he is convinced of the folly and vanity of all human devices, that God, our own chastening but loving Father, comes to the rescue. He it is who leads him, "weary and heavy-laden," oppressed with the heat and ready to perish, to "the shadow of that great rock in a weary land." And, as he falls down exhausted in that cool shade, he is at ease and at rest. He knows that it is not like the checkered sunshine and shade of a tree or a vine, but it is the cool, unbroken shade of a *rock*, of "*a great rock in a weary land.*" And he is safe, "safe in the arms of Jesus," resting under the shadow of his great righteousness. His humble, penitent prayer has gone up from a broken heart, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," and, in answer to that simple prayer, he finds himself safe in "the shadow of that great rock" which God himself has projected for weary souls.

Again, it is hard to tell whether it is piety or the

want of it that makes us use that language of the Psalmist, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." No doubt sometimes it is the very essence of murmuring and repining—the very concentration of a dissatisfied, unhappy spirit. We are not content to "suffer and be strong," not content to trust ourselves into the hands of our heavenly Father. We grow unhappy in our lot, discontented with providence, fretful and peevish under the accumulation of what we call human ills. And then it is that with a great show of piety we utter the sentiment, "Oh that I had wings like a dove ! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

But it is true that sometimes the pious soul does sigh for the peace and the rest of heaven. Even Paul said, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." And we, too, may have the same earnest longings when we sit down and contrast the pain and the sorrow of this world with the holy rest and joy of that which is to come.

When we think of our sins and our sorrows, of our griefs and our partings ; when we think of our relapses into sin, and our bitter repentings ; when we think of our misfortunes and miseries, our prone-

ness to go astray, and the anguish that must follow,—it is not hard to sigh for that sweet home where we shall dwell with God and the holy forevermore. “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.” “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” When we think of these things, and picture to a pure and chastened fancy this future home of all the saints, it is easy to yearn for its holy joys, and long to mingle in the blessed company that clusters around the throne.

“I want to put on my attire,
Washed white in the blood of the Lamb;
I want to be one of your choir,
And tune my sweet harp to his name;
I want—oh, I want to be there,
Where sorrow and sin bid adieu,
Your joy and your friendship to share,
To wonder and worship with you.”

These are but the holiest breathings of a pious soul. They are but the gracious yearnings of a soul which pants for God as the hart panteth after

the water-brooks, and which longs to be filled with the fullness of God. And such a soul can say, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness," and it never will be, never can be, until then. But meantime our Lord Jesus stands as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," and to us all he says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

PART III.

A MODEL CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

A MODEL CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

"And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."—Luke i. 6.

THIS sounds as if it might be a description of Adam and Eve before the fall. It surely is very high commendation for an ordinary husband and wife, and shows a degree of sanctity that is not often attained. But the parties were not Adam and Eve, and the place was not that beautiful garden where, in primitive simplicity and innocence, they had found a home. It was an aged couple who had served God in the temple for many years—Zacharias and Elisabeth—and the state of heart described was the result of the grace of God, working in ordinary human souls.

"And they were both righteous before God"—the husband, as well as the wife—"walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." They were just such a couple as we sometimes see at the present day—what Payson

called "a blameless pair," united in marriage by the ordinance of God, and united in heart and soul by that wondrous and amazing grace which is even stronger and purer than mere human love.

I. The characters here presented.

As far as outward appearances were concerned, there may not have been anything very striking about them. They were "well stricken in years," and at this time were childless, but they were to be the parents of John the Baptist. Zacharias was a priest, and as such took his course in serving in the temple. Elisabeth, in the mean time, attended to her domestic duties, and in her quiet sphere served God and "waited for the consolation of Israel." But they were both "righteous before God," and this not naturally, for they were both descendants of Adam, and heirs to the common ruin that had come to all the race.

But, in the mean time, grace had come into their hearts, and even before the birth of Jesus, the son of Elisabeth's cousin, Mary, this grace had changed the hearts of both husband and wife. Their own son, not yet born, was to point to this son of Mary and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." But, by the grace of God, that "Lamb had been slain from the founda-

tion of the world," and so the blood to be shed on the cross had power in advance to blot out these sins, and "the Lord" became "their righteousness" before he was born.

A planter or a farmer will sometimes give "a lien" or "a mortgage" on a crop of cotton or corn that is yet to be grown. God was so sure that his own Son would do all that he had contracted to do in the "covenant of grace" that he was not afraid to advance the grace that was needed to redeem these souls, even before Christ was born a man. And it is in this way we are to account for the saving of all God's saints who came before the birth of Christ.

And they were both "righteous before God;" *i. e.* in the sight not merely of men but of God they were righteous. We can deceive our fellow-men and can deceive ourselves, but this husband and wife were both righteous in the sight of God. They had the approval of that great Being who "sees the heart," who can read all the secret emotions and intentions that move and actuate the heart. This implies a change of heart, a supernatural change of their whole moral character, a radical, spiritual change in the very constitution of their being. It implies that they were not merely loving and faith-

ful to their marriage vows, but that they both kept their vows toward God. They were "born again," and with a new spiritual life in the heart they were now trying to serve God in fidelity. They looked upon themselves as God's creatures, and, as such, felt that his eye was upon them at all times and under all circumstances. They knew that this life was not all, and that the happiest human homes would soon be broken up, while that which was spiritual was immortal and eternal. As husband and wife they loved each other, and as they were old and well stricken in years, it is to be hoped and presumed that the golden link which had bound them so long was brighter and stronger because of the common experience of these many years. The effervescence of youth had vanished, but "a love stronger than death" had only bound them more closely after so many years of married life. There is something very touching in the sight of an aged couple, who have climbed life's hill together, walking hand in hand down the western slope, where the setting sun still gilds the frosted head with its soft and mellow rays.

But regarding this aged couple, as we sometimes see even now, there was something sweeter and more precious still. Of them, as of David and Jon-

athan, it might be said, "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." They were both righteous before God, redeemed by the same blood, changed by the same grace, cheered by the same hope, children of the same Father, the same heavenly sunshine of God's smile upon the whole household. The man was nothing but a priest, and had but little of this world's goods to make him what the world calls happy, but, like Goldsmith's village pastor,

"He was passing rich on forty pounds a year."

There was in his heart, and in the heart of his pious wife, a mine of wealth richer than all the gold-mines of this world combined. They were rich in faith, rich in all the promises of God, rich in the hope of a coming Saviour, rich in favor with God and man.

II. We have here an inspired statement of the effect of this state of heart. "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Commenting on this, Dr. Payson says: "To be righteous is to be conformed to the rule of right; and the only rule of right is the will of God as expressed in his commandments and ordinances."

These are not the same. The commands of God are his moral precepts; and by his ordinances are meant those religious rites and institutions he has directed us to observe. Repent, believe the gospel, be holy, are commands. Religious worship, baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances. He that is righteous before God will observe both. In this respect many fail. Some pretend to obey God's commands, while they neglect his ordinances. Others visibly observe his ordinances, but neglect his commands. The truly righteous esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and observe them not on occasions only, when it suits their convenience, but habitually. This was the case with these parents of John the Baptist. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," was a sacred compact made by Zacharias; and in that compact Elisabeth was as deeply in earnest as was her husband. And so in the sight of God they were righteous, and in the sight of men they were blameless.

But what is it to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless?

It is to regulate our whole conduct, at home and in all our business relations, by the precepts of the Bible. If there is any other rule by which we are

to regulate and govern our lives, I do not know what it is. There are some who seem to take all their ideas of life from what others believe and practice. There are some who seem to emulate the example of others, and their idea is to make home happy after a worldly sort. Their idea seems to be that religion and the service of God are irksome duties that have to be performed, but that worldly amusements are the only sources of real happiness. And so, while the family is called a Christian family, and we are apt to find a family Bible in the parlor, that is about all there is in the home to distinguish it from the most godless household in all the community. There is no blessing asked at the table. There is no daily reading of the Bible. There is no family worship. There are music and dancing and card-playing—all the things that a Christian can borrow from the devil to make home “attractive.”

And such a home is attractive in the same sense that a gambling-saloon is attractive to a man who wants to gain money without honest work. But surely such a home is not a Christian home; not like the home at Bethany where our Saviour loved to rest himself when weary. It is not a place where he loves to dwell, nor is it a place where

the family loves to know that he comes as a frequent guest.

I have sometimes found, in pastoral visitation, a pack of cards lying on the same table with a family Bible. And in such cases it is not hard to tell which of the two takes up the most time or claims the most study and attention on the part of that family. And if such a family did not know it was wrong, why was there that sense of shame at the presence of the pastor?

Would John the Baptist have been the man he was had his childhood and youth been passed in such a home? Were wine-drinking and merriment main ingredients in the home life of the blameless pair? No. There is not a turn in the text that does not, in the conscience of every Christian, prevent even the suggestion of such a parody on a Christian home. And yet these are the parties held up to us as examples of what we all ought to become as Christian parents.

God's word is the infallible guide for our conduct; the study of that word should be our daily delight, and there should be an honest effort on our part to walk daily in the way marked out in that word as the only way to heaven. There should be daily repentance of sin, daily faith in Christ as a

personal Saviour, and daily obedience to God in all that he commands us to do for his glory, as well as for our own highest happiness and good.

There are many such homes, and they are sweet and pleasant resorts for a Christian soul. They are modeled on the home at Bethany, and it seems to me that our Saviour must love to be an inmate of such a home. Not that he needs such a home now, but he himself is the light and the life of such a home. It is his own blessed presence that fills that home with joy and gladness, and that makes it somewhat a foretaste of another home which he has gone to prepare. It is not perfect, for nothing that is earthly is perfect. But as far as human nature can be made perfect in this world the inmates are perfect, and as far as human happiness can be complete, it is so in such a Christian home.

But when we want to find out the cause of this we have to look down below the surface; for the real cause is down in the hearts of those who do love the Lord and are trying to serve him. In other words, it is due to those who are righteous before God and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

As a matter of course, the world does not look upon it in that light, and such a home would be a dreary place to those who had such worldly tastes. But around such a home the angels of God are hovering, and the spirit of God is a constant inmate. It may be but a plain and modest cottage, wanting in many of the comforts and luxuries common to other dwellings; but God is there, the Bible is there, religion is there, the love of Christ is there, contentment and peace are there. And when shadows fall, as sooner or later they are sure to fall on all our homes, there will be light, divine light, that will shine in the midst of the shadows, and there will rest upon that home "the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow."

And now the point is just this: the piety of the parents is what makes that a typical home. Their will, subordinate to God's will, must be the ruling power in such a home. Their godly influence and example must be felt upon all the members of such a family. Their wish must be law, enforced in the name of God and by God's authority upon that whole family. And when this is the case the effect will be seen and felt among all the inmates of the family.

I know there is a disposition in these days to let

children rule the family, and there is a restlessness on the part of the young at not being allowed to have their own way and even to upset and overturn all the old rules and laws that were once looked upon as essential to family government. This is called an age of progress, of upheaval, of revolution. But not all change is improvement; and the setting aside of the laws and ordinances of God never has been and never can be an improvement on what God has ordered. "To the law and to the testimony" we must appeal if we want to be right and want to do right as God's children.

And, what is more, there must be hearty agreement between husband and wife in the management of the house. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" There must be unity of mind and heart in such a home, or else there must be endless confusion, resulting in a kind of pandemonium. The husband and wife ought both to be Christians—earnest, devoted Christians. But if one is not, then the one who is ought, in the name of our Master and for the good of all, to be allowed to give a Christian impress to that family. It tramples on no rights of a godless man for a Christian wife to "bring up her children in the nurture

and admonition of the Lord.” But it does trample on her rights, and trample on her conscience, and trample on her heart, for a loving but godless husband to rub out from the hearts of their children what she would impress there in the name of her Saviour. He has no conscience in the matter, but she has. With him there are no principles involved, but with her the deepest feelings and convictions of her heart are enlisted.

How far a wife can go, and ought to go, in such a case it is hard to tell. Such divisions in a family are to be deplored—most seriously deplored ; still, God demands, and has a right to demand, implicit obedience to all his laws.

And now, what an appeal comes to the hearts of an ungodly husband and wife when they begin to think of these immortal souls committed to their charge ! Zacharias and Elisabeth were not aware, at the time, of what God had in store for them. But the forerunner of our Saviour, John the Baptist, was to be trained up by them in that quiet home at Hebron. And God, by his grace, had been training them for that great mission. It was to this end, as well as for their own good, that God had given them that rectitude of heart and life in which they were walking as a blameless pair. They

were to impress on that young mind and heart "the beauty of holiness." They were to educate him in all the elements of divine knowledge and piety. They were to train him, by example as well as by precept, in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. It was from them that John was to learn his first lessons in youthful piety, and from their hands he was to receive that careful and godly tuition which would leave the deepest impress on his soul.

But now let me ask you, Have you any conception of what future men or women may be growing up around your hearthstone? There are times when, as a father or a mother, you are forced to think of such things. These children are growing so fast that before you are aware of it they will be men and women. The formative period of their lives, it may be, is already past, and there is a type of character which you have unconsciously impressed on them. Whether you wanted to or not, your own views and opinions and modes of thought—and, above all, your religious or irreligious character—have already been impressed on them. Our children are very apt to do as we do, and not as we tell them to do. Long after a father and mother are dead we can see their characters and

modes of life reproduced in their children. The home influence which we have imbibed is apt to show itself in our own families, and from us to be handed down again to those who come after us. This is one way in which “God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him.” And this is also the way in which he “sheweth mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments.” “No man liveth to himself,” and if this be so, surely no father and no mother can be so devoid of all influence as to make no impression and leave no impression on the plastic characters of those who in childhood are committed to their care and placed directly under their parental authority.

Eli was a good man, but “his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not,” and they all perished. Zacharias and Elisabeth were “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” and “among all the sons of men,” said our Saviour, “there was not a greater than John the Baptist.”

III. By way of affliction.

Let me exhort all my readers to lay to heart this solemn subject. None of us doubt, or can

doubt, that home influence is the strongest influence that can be exerted in this world. It is constant in its daily effect upon children at an age when they are most easily and most indelibly impressed. It comes from those who are naturally and rightly looked upon as bound by their duty to God to impress what is good and holy upon their plastic characters. To them we are an embodiment of right thinking and right acting, and up to an age when they can judge for themselves we are a standard of right both in theory and practice. And even when old enough to think for themselves, what we have taught them by our own example will have a tremendous influence upon them.

And now I ask you, Are you, as husband and wife, a blameless pair? Are you both "righteous before God"? Have you both found "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"? Are you both bound together by the strong tie of a common faith, "a like precious faith" in him who came as the "Light of the world" and the "Light of home"? Are you partakers of a common grace, and sharers in a common hope, and partners in a common service? In one sense yokefellows, are you pulling together in the same narrow way that leads to heaven? Together responsible for these

children, are you helping each other so to train them that they will scatter roses along your path, instead of planting thorns in your pillow when you are old and gray-headed?

Is yours a divided house, or one where perfect unity of mind and heart, of will and purpose, of hope and desire, give a combined sanction to all that God demands in the way of duty and service? Are you both righteous, or is there a diversity of mind and heart on this vital subject of eternal and unspeakable importance?

Ah! there are some sad hearts when I ask these questions. It is a painful fact that there are many such divided households, and if the Lord were suddenly to come, "the one would be taken and the other left." "The great gulf" is already there; it may be not yet "fixed," but it is there between these souls bound together by the purest, strongest, tenderest of all human ties; and under God it is for you to say whether that gulf shall be fixed as an impassable gulf for ever.

When Naomi was about to part with Orpah and Ruth they both lifted up their voices and wept. Orpah went back unto her people and unto her gods, but Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for

whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part you and me." Let that be the earnest purpose and resolution of every unconverted husband toward his wife, and after death does part, as part it will and must, there will be a family reunion that shall never be broken any more. And may God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PART IV.

A WORD TO THE WEARY.

A WORD TO THE WEARY.

INTRODUCTION.

THE wise man has said, “A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” There are none of us, young or old, who cannot testify to that truth from our own experience. There have been times in our checkered lives when human friends have had the good sense and the love to speak to us the *word*, the *one word*, the *very word* that was needed at that very moment.

In old times pieces of metal or ivory or wood were shaped like coins and made to represent certain sums of money. These were called “counters,” and took the place of what we now call checks, bank-notes or bonds. This gave rise to that shrewd remark of some writer, “Words are the *counters* of wise men and the *money* of fools.”

The same word used by one man will have a different meaning from what it has when flippantly

spoken by another. Let a number of children be playing around their mother, and a hundred times a day they will come to her and ask, "Mother, may I do this or that?" It is such a constant thing that the poor, jaded woman scarcely knows, half the time, what the question is, and answers mechanically, "Yes" or "No." But let the father come in from his office or his counting-room, and he cannot help weighing the meaning of the question. His "yes" or "no" must mean something, for in his daily transactions hundreds and thousands of dollars often depend on his answer to questions.

A quarter of a cent is a very small sum, but a quarter of a cent, where a thousand bales of cotton are for sale, means a vast amount of money. And so, with constant fluctuations in the market, the one word "buy" or "sell" sent over the wire means the change of hands for hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

In the social sphere also those short words "yes" and "no" have been "*counters*," that no actual amount of money can properly represent. Those of us who have been married long enough can appreciate, to some extent, what was meant away back in that dim and misty past that seems so long ago. But the young people of to-day who thoughtlessly

use or recant the “yes” or the “no” do not, for they cannot realize what a world of joy or woe depends on that one breath. A whole lifetime of unalloyed happiness or misery must depend on that word, that one word, which will break or bind two human hearts or human lives.

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Knowing this, our Lord Jesus has said, through Isaiah, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” It requires “the tongue of the learned” for such a delicate work. Many a heart is grieved and almost broken by words that are spoken without due consideration. Many a word is spoken whose sting was not intended and whose meaning was not understood at the time. Apart from rash, hasty, angry, intemperate words, there are cases where even simple words are twisted out of shape and made to carry along with them a sting that the speaker never designed. They are perverted by a bad heart or, it may be, by a want of tact and prudence in the knowledge of words.

But our Lord Jesus had “the tongue of the learned.” He knew what word to use at the proper time, and how to use it for a specific purpose.

Taken as a whole, for terseness of style and for simplicity of meaning there is no book in the world that compares with the Bible. And among all the parts of this book, there are none that have more "words in season to him that is weary" than those parts which give us the *acts* and the *words* of our blessed Lord and Master. And as we look at some of these while sitting at his feet, let us bear in mind that they were spoken for us, as well as for those who heard them from his human lips. And our own hearts will endorse the sentiment, "Never man spake like this man."

CHAPTER I.

AN ANTIDOTE FOR WORRY.

SUCH must have been the wonderful words of our Lord Jesus that everything he ever spoke was worthy of being handed down to all the ages. We all know how the words of wise men are treasured as something worthy of universal admiration. The wit of Sydney Smith and the glittering plays of Shakespeare are held up to the gaze of all who love the English language.

But here was a man who, as a public man, was known among his fellows for less than three years. The life of the man, as we have it recorded, when printed and bound can be bought for a dime and put in the vest-pocket. The whole of it could be printed in a tract, and is not as large as many an essay. But what a book ! What a man it tells about, and "what wondrous words of grace he spoke!" The Gospel by Matthew, the Gospel by Mark, the Gospel by Luke, the Gospel by John,—take any one of them, or all together, and we have the birth, life, miracles, words, sufferings, death,

resurrection, ascension, of a man compressed into the shortest space—of a man who was worthy of the pen of the Holy Ghost, the third person of the adorable Trinity ! Never was there, in all the ages, such another man as this ; and the little we have of his life and words has furnished a theme for more books, and more writings of every sort, than all other lives that were ever lived on earth put together. The fact is, the evangelists spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they selected in the way of words and deeds were the warp and woof of that wondrous story, more wild and varied than a poet's dream, and more blessed in its results than all other records of human history.

Let us listen again to some of those “words to the weary” that fell at times from his gracious lips.

There are people in the world who are always troubled about pecuniary affairs. Not that they are in want, but they seem to be afraid that they or their children will be.

“Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long.”

That maxim is false in fact, and what the author should have said was,

“Man *needs* but little here below,
Nor *needs* that little long.”

The trouble is that men are not content with what things they have, but are always wanting or wishing for what they have not and what they ought not to have. Our Lord was not bemoaning his own poverty when he compressed it all in a nutshell and said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." No, this was not a sigh of discontent, but it was to rebuke those who would follow him not on principle, but for "the loaves and fishes."

In his "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus had a certain class of people in his mind. The sermon was preached to a small audience, but he knew it would be reported, not by a stenographer, but by one who could carry every word in his memory and dictate to the human scribes just what he wanted to say to all the ages. He knew that all the readers of the Bible that ever lived would read that sermon. And so he was preaching that day to an audience larger than could have gathered on every foot of ground in Palestine. And hence we are to look upon his words not as confined to these favored and faithful few, but as the words of a prime minister, which are read around the whole world.

There are many people who are constantly wor-

ried with these questions, "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The Lord knew that, and he knew the basis of that over-anxious care about these things that are "to perish with the using." He had been cutting at the root of such a spirit just before. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." There was the seat of the trouble—not a prudent forethought, but covetousness, greed of gain, "making haste to be rich;" not an actual fear of nakedness or starvation, but an unconscious *hankering*, as the old writers called it—hankering after the glittering but perishable riches of the earth. It was to rebuke that spirit and to show just where it led that he spoke this "word in season."

And he knew not only where it came from, but also whither it led. Insensibly such a man comes to the choice of a master, for really none of us are free, absolutely free.

"One is your master, even Christ," may be said

of some. “One is your master, even Satan,” may be said of others. “His servants we are whom we obey;” and all of us are serving some master, whether we know it and intend it or not.

But “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Confronted with this fact, which every man, rich or poor, knows to be a fact, the question comes up, “How am I to make a living for myself and family?” Oh, is that the question, the whole of it? Merely a living, a comfortable support? You may search the Bible through, and that is about all that God promises for this world. Elijah was to have food brought to him by the ravens, and he could find water enough in the brook. The widow’s meal-barrel and her oil-cruse were not to get empty, but the Lord never promised that she should have miraculous meal and oil to sell, and so get rich while her poor neighbors were starving. But she did have enough for herself and for the man of God while he was serving the Lord.

There is just where people—and good people—make mistakes in the critical contrast between Lazarus, in rags and wretchedness, and the rich man in

purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day. They forget that the rich man was having his “good things in this life,” while Lazarus could afford to wait for his until the next.

Knowing all this, the Lord says, “Therefore,” that is, because, “ye cannot serve God and mammon.” “Take no thought for your life,” your merely human, temporal life—what you shall eat, drink or wear. “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Is there not, within this frail tenement which the winds can shake, and the cold pinch, and hunger starve, a something which no raiment can clothe and which no bread can feed? Is there not a something here which, in spite of all the purple and fine linen and all the sumptuous fare of kings, may perish in hunger and nakedness?

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”

All the food in the world beyond a certain necessary amount will be a waste of raw material. No matter how rich and dainty and sumptuous the fare, it will not make a man grow beyond his allotted

stature. It will not add one cubit to his height. No, it may add to his vanity and self-conceit and personal pride to know that he can spread a feast that is worthy of a king, but “it cannot add one cubit to his stature.”

“And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” They grow, simply grow. And they are so beautiful that the highest ambition of an artist is not to make a lily or to surpass one, but to imitate one. And the more perfect the imitation, the higher the art and the more famous the artist.

But, after all, the lily is but grass, and soon fades and withers and loses all its fragrance and beauty. “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” Not in purple and fine linen, not in silks and velvets, but in raiment adapted to your station in society. That is all that any of us should want, for surely it is all that any of us can need. “Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed?” Why? “For your heavenly

Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." What then? "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Oh, what a blessed assurance that is to those who are sometimes filled with anxiety about even their daily bread! It is hard, very hard, to put in practice these plain lessons of the word. But the Lord has made good that promise so it has never failed. And there are times when we can take hold of the promise and sing:

"Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown to-morrow
Bring with it what it may.

"It can bring with it nothing
But he will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing
Will clothe his people too.

"Beneath the spreading heavens
No creature but is fed;
And he who feeds the ravens
Will give his children bread."

CHAPTER II.

MISTS CLEARED AWAY.

OF our Lord Jesus it was said, even by those who rejected him, "Never man spake like this man." That must have been true in more senses than one. "He knew what was in man," and, hence, what man wanted. He knew just how to adapt his words to all classes and conditions of men. There was a sense in which "the child Jesus" grew in stature and in understanding. Not only his body but his mind grew from a child's mind to a man's mind. And while he could ask and answer questions with the rabbis when but twelve years old, there came a time when the wisest among them were afraid to meet him in debate.

But while he was wise enough to grapple with the deepest dogmas of religion, "the common people heard him gladly." He was always God, but as a man he was wise enough to speak to his fellow-men in such a way that the unlettered could understand and appreciate what he said. Knowing men—all men, the wise as well as the unwise—he did not

speak to all alike, but he knew just how to adapt his words to each case. He would not cast pearls before swine, but he spoke words in season, always in season, "to them that were weary."

Bearing in mind, then, that all these words were for us, as well as for those to whom he first spoke them, let us study them and apply them to our own hearts.

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews ; the same came to Jesus by night." Why he came at night we cannot tell, nor does it matter. He came to talk with this wonderful man about his soul. He had faith enough to believe that Jesus was "a teacher sent of God." No man could do the works that he did unless God were with him. He was honest, candid, sincere in his talk with the Master. His aim was not to entangle him in his talk, as many tried to do. But had he spoken what was in his heart, he would have said, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" That was the unuttered question that was burning and bursting in his heart.

Jesus knew this just as well as he would have done had the man asked him in so many words. And so, to draw him out and to deepen the conviction that was already there, "Jesus answered

and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That was "a word in season" to one who was "weary."

It was not understood at the time. Yet it took Nicodemus out of his old ruts and led him into a new realm of thought and feeling. "Born again." Born again! Why, he had never heard of such a thing as that! It was impracticable. It was impossible in the very nature of things. "How can a man be born when he is old?" That was a most natural question. There are men to-day who have read these words a thousand times, but who ask this same question. They know what the Lord meant, while Nicodemus did not. But somehow they think as he did—that if a man lives up to his light, does the best he can, pays his honest debts, acts uprightly and does all he can to help the poor and needy he will reach heaven at last.

They think of man with man; not of man with God, not of man as a creature of God and a sinner against God, but man as connected with and identified with his fellow-man. This is what stands foremost when they think about religion. But the Lord knew that all that would come in as the result of "a change of heart," and that when men are

brought into union and communion with God, the relation of men to men would adjust itself and all would come right in the course of time.

The first thing, then, was to get the heart right, to put in a new mainspring. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," and this man's heart, as every other natural heart, was "not right in the sight of God." It is the heart, the soul, the moral nature, that makes the man. Not the body, not the mind, but the soul, that spiritual nature which can never die.

"That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." Yet to the mystified mind of Nicodemus these words were still not understood. Mindful of this, Jesus would point him away from all physical forces and all natural agencies, and hence he says, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." I did say it, and do say it again, strange and paradoxical as it may seem to you.

But "marvel not." Take it on faith; not as something to be understood, but as something to be believed. It is strange. It is mysterious. It is something you cannot understand. And so are other things too. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst

not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the spirit."

And now let us stop a while and think on that "word in season to a weary soul." That subject, "the new birth," or what we call "a change of heart," has always been dark and mysterious. There are honest men who cannot take it in. They feel the need of a power stronger than they are—an outside, spiritual, supernatural power. But they want to know, with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" We cannot, and Christ did not choose to answer the question. But he did try to bring it down to the faith of this learned man, who had to become as a little child before he could get heavenly wisdom.

There is the wind. How do I know it? I cannot see it, cannot tell where it comes from nor where it is going. But I know it because I hear it and feel it, and, above all, because I see its wondrous effects. The kite rises ; the ship sails ; the waves of the ocean dash in huge breakers upon the beach. The trees of the forest are twisted like weeds by the cyclone, and the sands of the desert are piled up like snowdrifts before the furious and deadly sirocco.

It is strange that air, the subtlest of all fluids, can

have such power—such amazing, wonderful, almost miraculous power. That air—thin, transparent air, so light that the wings of a moth can move it—can become a force, a physical force, that can blow down the largest trees and rock the largest ship like an infant's cradle.

But if this be true—and we know it is true—why wonder that a spiritual agent whom we call the Holy Ghost has power to change, to renew, to transform, to regenerate these human souls? One is no stranger than the other, nor is it harder to believe, nor is it more apparent to the true judgment of men. For, say what we please, there are cases of what are called conversion, or more properly regeneration, that are more wonderful displays of power—an unseen, subtle, spiritual power—than is the track of a cyclone an evidence of the power of the wind.

Whence, then, comes this strange, spiritual, supernatural power? “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

He was still in the region of mystery, but that old type of the brazen serpent was familiar to the mind of Nicodemus. How a look, a mere look, a

simple look at that brazen serpent, could take away the sting, and act as an antidote to the deadly poison, no human being has ever been able to tell.

But Nicodemus knew, and they all knew, that such had been the case. And so now it should be the case that a look, a look of true, earnest, living faith at the crucified One, should cause a new life-current to spring up in the soul. Somehow, in the mystery of God's adorable grace, there was in that "crucified One" a fountain of life from which the sinner who felt the sting of sin could find relief from the pain, and life from the dead.

"There is life for a look at the crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto him and be saved—
Unto him who was nailed to the tree."

"Oh, why was he there as the bearer of sin,
If on Jesus thy guilt was not laid?
Oh, why from his side flowed the sin-cleansing blood,
If his dying the debt has not paid?"

CHAPTER III.

NOT SOUGHT, BUT FOUND.

IN striking contrast with the case of Nicodemus there is another story, which we all love to read over and over again. It is the incident of the woman at Jacob's well. The Lord himself was weary hungry and thirsty, but he was never too tired to "speak a word in season to one that was weary."

But this interview has always seemed to be one of the most touching scenes in our Lord's earthly life. It was such a wondrous display of human sympathy and divine condescension and compassion that we can never cease to wonder. Why he should have selected such a person as this, and such an occasion as this, to let out the great secret of his divine mission has always seemed a mystery.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews and a learned student of the Old Testament, and it seemed right and proper that he should have unfolded to him the mysteries of the "new birth." Zaccheus, though small of stature, was a rich publican and also a "son of Abraham." Peter and James and John

were designed of him to be his future apostles. But here was a woman of bad character, of deep-rooted national prejudices, and showing no special grasp of mind. She appears long enough to call forth this wonderful discourse, and then, like Lot's wife, vanishes as suddenly as she had appeared, and we hear no more about her.

She was evidently one of the common class, and yet, under all her obtuseness of mind and national prejudice, she had not been devoid of all religious instruction. There was, to her mind, a hope, common in those days, that the Messiah would come. She had been taught by the traditions of her people to look upon Mt. Gerizim as a holy mountain, and to expect the Messiah to come there, and not to Jerusalem. She was ready to discuss religious matters even with a stranger, and that stranger evidently a Jew. Gradually and most adroitly this stranger led her on from one point to another until he threw a sudden flash of light upon her sinful domestic life, and thus convinced her that he knew all about her past story of sorrow and of sin.

No wonder that she tried to turn the conversation, and to elude the keen scrutiny of those searching eyes which could read through and through her heart and character. It was not impertinence and

not unkindness on his part ; but, like a skillful surgeon, he would probe deeper and deeper until the poor sinner herself should understand the nature of her malady. He intended to cure, but he could not do this until he went to the very seat of the disease.

She had first perceived that he was a prophet. But by and by, to her wondering mind, he had said, "I am the Messiah." Just then the disciples came, and while they "marveled that he talked with the woman, yet no man said, What seekest thou ? or, Why talkest thou with her ?" They thought it strange, for men did not usually speak with a woman in public, but "the woman left her water-pot and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ?"

This was an exaggeration, a wild statement, but it was natural in her state of mind. What he did tell her showed that he knew all that ever she did, and with a quick flash of memory, like that which a man has when drowning, she did have brought back to her the salient points in a godless, sinful life. The whole course of her past life, with all its sorrows and all its sins, was made to stand out in vivid colors, and her heart sank within her, as she

thought that here was a stranger who knew all about her.

“The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Our Lord knew just what he was striking at and the word that was needed. It was not a random shot, but a centre shot at short range, and the cry came forth showing that the heart was struck. “All her sins were set in order before her,” and hastily leaving her water-pot, just as the fishermen left their nets, she hurried away to Sychar to tell the people the good news that the Messiah had come. “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did.”

If she had stopped at this the men might have thought that there was some wandering juggler or soothsayer or fortune-teller out there at the well. They might have thought that John the Baptist had suddenly appeared, or that God had raised up another prophet and sent him to Samaria, as he had sent prophets in the olden time.

But she did not stop at that. “Is not this the Christ?” she asked. He had told her so, and had

confirmed it by telling her "all that ever she did." But the news seemed too good to be true; and, besides, he was not a Samaritan. Evidently he was a Jew, and claimed that salvation was of the Jews. Still there was a strange power in the man—a wondrous insight into character, a marvelous fascination about the way in which he had talked to her. All that she could say was, "Come and see for yourselves. Is not this the Christ?"

What a wondrous change had been wrought by these words to one who was weary! She had gone out to the well to draw water. She was a sinner, but the burden of her sin was as light to her as her empty water-pot. It did not concern her in the least. She was ready for a talk even with a stranger, and that stranger a Jew. To bandy a few words of impertinence would serve to while away a few idle moments. She did not know the man, nor did she care to know him or to know what he was doing there.

It could have been but a short conversation, for while they were talking the disciples came back with the bread they had bought. But what a change had come over the whole heart and life of that poor woman! Saul went out to look after his father's asses, and was anointed a king. But this

woman went out for a water-pot of water, and came back without the water-pot, but with a well of living water springing up in her own heart unto life everlasting.

And, not content to keep the secret to herself, she told all she met, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" "Then they went out of the city and came unto him." There must have been a strange light in that woman's eye, a strange fire in that woman's heart, a strange urgency in that woman's voice, which, together, made men feel that she had met with some wonderful man who had brought about a radical change in her heart.

They knew who she was and what she was, and they would never have listened to her burning words had they not seen and felt that there was some one at the well worth going to see. "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." "So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them; and he abode there two days." "And many men believed, because of his own word; and said unto the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we

have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Her words to them were confirmed.

What a famous character that woman had become all at once! Notorious she must have been before, but now she is the centre of religious attraction, and around her are gathered these crowds of people, who are as full of joy and gladness as she is herself. And yet it was a short message that she had spoken.

Besides, his own disciples had been there to buy bread ; why did they not tell these people that their Master was out at the well ready to preach to them the gospel of the kingdom ? Oh ! they were Jews, and had as deep a prejudice against the Samaritans as these had against the Jews. And so the Lord had to convert a Samaritan first, and then send her to tell the good news to those in her own city.

. But when she came—a woman, and perhaps the weakest and the worst of them all—and told them how he had told her all that ever she did, they came out, prompted by a common impulse and ready to see for themselves. And when they came, Jacob's well became more famous than it had ever been since the days of the patriarch. And from that well, as a type of gospel grace, living fountains

have sprung up in thousands of souls from that day to this. It has been a theme for the poet and the artist, for the teacher and the preacher, and, like that "living water" of which it tells, it is one of those perennial fountains of gospel truth that can never be exhausted.

And in view of that wonderful well of salvation, the Saviour still stands and says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURDEN LIFTED.

THERE was a woman who was accused of sin, and who was arrested and brought before the Master. It was not because those who arrested her cared for the sin, but because they wanted to use her as a decoy to draw him into some fatal mistake.

It was a painful case, for the woman, though devoid of character and self-respect, must have shrunk from contact with such a pure and spotless being. Around her were those brazen hypocrites who claimed that according to the law of Moses she ought to be stoned to death. Self-righteous, but with the most malicious treachery in their hearts, they crowd around him, not so much to convict the woman as to get some good ground on which they hope to convict the Lord himself.

Reading the mean, low purpose of these malignant men, "he stooped down and wrote on the ground as if he heard them not." Thus he gave them time to think and to be ashamed of their un-

manly and ungenerous conduct. But when he saw they were lost to all sense of shame, “He lifted up himself and said, He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.”

That was a centre shot, and he could afford to let it rankle in their consciences if these were not “seared with a hot iron.” Happily for them, this was not the case, for, showing that the shot had not missed the mark, we read: “And they that heard it, being convicted in their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”

The Lord knew very well that all of them were gone, but “when he had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord.” This was true; but how that poor, trembling, conscience-stricken woman must have felt under the searching eye of that spotless embodiment of inexorable justice! She knew that she was a sinner, and she knew that he knew too that she was a sinner. And while no man dared to confront her with the charge, under such exactions as he had made, she

must have known, and she did know, that all her sins were “naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom she had to do.”

Justly, she might have dreaded to stand in his presence, for she must have known that she could not evade him. But instead of a withering rebuke or a word of harsh reproach, “Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.”

“A word in season to one that was weary”! A word to rebuke, to reproach, to bring back the memory of the sinful past, but at the same time a word to restore self-respect, to kindle repentance for the past and a hope for better things in the future! “Go, and sin no more.” Turn away from that life of sin and shame. There is hope for you and there is help for you. But “sin no more.” “Your way is dark, and leads to hell.” As “a brand plucked from the burning,” I would rescue you from a life of ruin. But “sin no more.” Let the memory—the awful, wretched memory—of the wreck and ruin of the past be a beacon to warn you where the rocks are hid that can send you reeling down to ruin everlasting!

Has not this been “a word in season” to many a weary soul since then? The world may turn against us. Good men and bad men may think

and say hard things against us. In our oyn hearts we may know that we are sinners. But when we stood face to face with Him who knew us better than all other men, and better than we know ourselves, there was such pity in his looks and such sympathy in his voice that we could feel somehow that we had one friend who would never desert us. And "Go, and sin no more" has been to many of us an assurance of pardon, and an impulse and incentive to a purer and a better life.

There was another notable case where a mother came to him with "a daughter grievously vexed with a devil." To her fervent and impassioned appeal at first, it is said, "he answered her not a word." This seemed strange, harsh, unkind, ungenerous, almost unmanly. And then, by way of extenuation, he said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Not thwarted even by such a rebuff, she came again "and worshiped him, saying, Lord, help me." That surely would move and even melt him. "But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This surely will repulse her, and even fill her with disgust.

Ah! She was a mother, and her daughter was "vexed with a devil;" and that strange man had

the power to “cast out devils,” and there was the only hope for a rescue. That was enough for her; and so, undaunted and unabashed, she said, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” What a word that was—“a word in season to one who was weary”! “O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The whole treasury of God’s untold riches of grace placed at the disposal of her own will on the ground of her faith!

And what was true of her is true of every mother who will come with the same faith and the same zeal and the same importunate resolution to “keep on praying” until she is heard. There is where we sometimes fail even where a great burden is resting on our souls. There is a want of faith or a want of zeal or a want of persistence, and so we miss the mark, and God does not grant what was to us the greatest want of our souls.

But how can we fail to take hold of this “word in season to him that is weary”? Surely it has nerved the heart of many a parent when children, dear as life to them, have been bound hand and foot

to the devil. And it does come to us with as much assurance of hope as it did to that mother who would not allow herself to be bluffed off by any apparent harshness.

The fact is, we do not take these “wonderful words of life” as we ought to. We do not apply them to ourselves, as we have a right to do and as God expects us to do. We admire them, approve them, are even amazed at their richness of meaning. But pearls are not appreciated by swine; and such is the perversity of human nature that we do not drink in all that is meant by these “wonderful words of life.” Rich as they are, sweet as they are, precious as they ought to be, they are to us as “sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”

Many of them are so old and familiar that they have long since lost their charm. And while they are as bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and honey out of the rock, somehow we do not feed on them to the nourishment of our souls. But the fact is, bread is insipid and tasteless, or even loathsome, to one who is not hungry, and there is loathing in the taste of honey to a surfeited soul. And hence even these words of the Lord Jesus are only sweet and precious to the soul that is weary.

Reader, are you not weary and heavy-laden?

Are you not tired out with the struggle against sin, with the burden of a guilty conscience, with the vain effort to get rid of sin—sin in the heart and sin in the life? If so, can there be found in all the Bible or in all the world a more seasonable word than this: “Come unto me all ye that labor and that are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest”?

“Oh, word of words the sweetest,
 Oh, word in which there lie
All promise, all fulfillment,
 And end of mystery,
Lamenting or rejoicing,
 With doubt or terror nigh,
I hear the voice of Jesus,
 And to his cross I fly.”

CHAPTER V.

SEEKING TO SAVE.

THERE was a man named Zaccheus, who, being small of stature, had climbed a sycamore tree to get a look at the Master as he passed that way. He never dreamed that the Lord would see him, or care for him if he should happen to see him. But, to his utter amazement, there came an arrow up that tree that sent a thrill not of pain but of gladness to his soul : "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house." And when they had talked the matter over, how strangely that "word in season came to one who was weary" ! "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

How many, many weary souls have been cheered and made glad by that one word of promise !

There is a natural disposition on the part of a sinner under conviction to think that he must seek the Saviour—that he must humble himself in the

dust and somehow work himself up to a high pitch of excitement. In spite of himself he will take up an idea that there is a kind of unwillingness on the part of Christ to save him. He has some of that spirit shown by the prophets of Baal when they went through all kinds of religious antics and cried out, "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!"

It seems as if there was a kind of grim, sarcastic humor in old Elijah when he taunted them with the hint that Baal was asleep or was talking to some one else. But there are people to-day who seem to have just about the same ideas of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit. To hear them talk or to hear them pray we would think they had an idea that the Lord Jesus had gone to sleep again while they were out at sea in the midst of a storm.

But here was a man so small that he had to climb a tree to see over the heads of the people. It never occurred to him that the "Son of man was come to seek and to save that which was lost." But that was true; and, hid in the leaves, and smaller in character than he was in stature, the Lord saw him and sought him, and found him and saved him.

Is there not something in all this to encourage hope in some who have a very small estimate of themselves? Granting that you are young or small

or insignificant; granting that you are a sinner, shrinking like that poor woman who “only dared to touch the hem of his garment;” granting that you are not worthy that he should come to your house,—is it not a fact, a blessed fact, that the “Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”?

And are you not lost? A poor, helpless sinner, not able to think a good thought or to speak a good word or to feel an emotion that is worthy of him whom the angels worship and adore! He said once, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” He is like the woman who went all over the house sweeping with one hand and holding a candle in the other, looking for the lost piece of money. And you are the lost piece of money. In one sense, and perhaps by your own estimate, not worth much, but as God looks at it, and in the esteem of the Lord himself, worth more than a world. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

You are the lost sheep, with no more reason, no more prudence, no more knowledge how to get back into the fold than a sheep. But he is the “Good Shepherd.” He laid down his life for the sheep, and ever since he has been leaving the ninety and nine and hunting up the one that is lost. The sheep are always straying, and so he has to be always on the search for those that are lost.

Oh, if the sinner, young or old, would just grasp the idea, the true idea, the real idea, that is wrapped up in that “word” of the Master : “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The Son of God became the Son of man, and came into the world to seek and to save ; not merely to seek, but also to save that which was lost. What a word, what a blessed, blessed word in season, that is to one that is weary !

There is another case which in some respects is the most touching miracle of all the list. “And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech ; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.” Now here was a deaf-mute. He could not ask the Lord to cure him, because he could not speak. The Lord could not speak to him, because he could not hear. How could he come in contact with him and cure him ?

“And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue, and, looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, be opened.”

Sign language! It has always seemed to me that this scene had more of the humanity of Christ, the human pity and human condescension and human gentleness of the Son of God, than any other. Here was a man deaf and dumb, but the Lord knew the deaf-mute sign language as well as Greek or Hebrew. And while the man looked at him, as a deaf-mute will look to catch every movement, he touched his ears to show that these were to be opened. He touched his tongue to show that this was to be unloosed. He then looked up to heaven and sighed, as if in prayer, to let him know that the power must come from above. And thus, having told the man what he would do and how he would work, he spoke one word, “Ephphatha,” and the man was a deaf-mute no longer. Lazarus was dead, but he heard the words “Come forth,” and came forth. This man was deaf, but he heard that word “Ephphatha,” and his ears were opened by the same almighty power that called Lazarus back from the dead.

But what “a word in season to one who was weary!” How strange it must have seemed to the keen eye of this deaf-mute as he watched all the movements of this wonderful man! And then, at once, to hear and to speak!

The Lord seems to have had a double lesson in that—one for those who teach and preach, and the other for those who, hearing, really do not hear. Our families, our Sunday-schools, our churches, are full of deaf-mutes. In a spiritual sense they can neither hear nor speak, and we are trying all the time to make them hear. Now and then, by a little sign language, we can catch their notice, and they seem to read what we mean by our actions, while they cannot hear our voice.

But after all we are brought face to face with the fact that all our words are as powerless to move them as are the words spoken to a man as deaf as a post. What then? Must we stop talking and stop preaching? No; but try to get at them by a sign language which they can comprehend, and in the mean time look up to let them know, and to let ourselves know, that the power must come from above—that we can no more make a deaf man hear than we can make a dead man come to life again. And when they and we can get that idea in our

hearts, and pray as the Lord prayed and as we ought to pray, there will be One who will say, "Ephphatha!" and they will be deaf-mutes no more for ever.

And if this be true of such a marvelous change at conversion, what shall it be by and by? Dr. A. A. Hodge thus tries to foretell what he has already experienced as to that outburst of rapture that comes to a dying saint:

"For illustration," he says, "imagine the case of Laura Bridgman, born without the sense either of sight or hearing, and, of course, utterly unable to conceive the use or the essence of either experience. Suppose that her teacher, endowed with supernatural power, should have placed her some day of the year, in the spring days of her life, on some central tower in the harbor of Boston. At first she would stand in absolute isolation, teeming with force and life and mind, touching the world only through the soles of her feet and the zephyrs which fanned her cheek, yet enveloped in darkness and silence infinite; alone and apart as really as if sunk in the abysses of night beyond the orbit of the nethermost sun. Suppose her teacher should then touch her and say, 'Daughter, hear!' and at once there should flow into her open soul all the myriad

voices of the globe. Suppose the teacher should again touch her and say, ‘Daughter, see?’ and suddenly that hitherto isolated soul should pass out in one instant into the infinite world, and take into her irradiated consciousness all the visions of the sea and earth under the stupendous sky. Without moving herself, or any change of environment, the mere opening of the ear and eye would widen her horizon infinitely, and bring her face to face with a thousand worlds, all new.

“Some such experience will be yours and mine when we are clothed upon with our glorified bodies on the morning of the resurrection. Coming up from rural or urban graveyards, rising before the awful whiteness of the throne and the intolerable glory of Him that sits thereon, and passing through the interminable ranks of flaming seraphs and dia-demed archangels, the perfect senses of our new bodies will bring us at once into the presence of the whole universe, of the music of all its spheres and of the effulgence of all its suns, of the most secret working of all its forces and of the recorded history of all its past.”

CHAPTER VI.

A WORD OF REPROACH.

THAT was a sad, sweet talk which our Saviour had with his disciples just before he was betrayed and arrested. There were many things he wanted to tell them which they might think over when he was gone. It seems to us that they had been very slow to learn a great many lessons he had taught them before this, and now that the end was so near there does seem to be a kind of special blindness on their part.

First one and then another would ask questions that seem strange to us, possibly because we have been so familiar with these things all our days. It was hard for them to take in the fact that he had to leave them, that he had to die, and harder still that he had to be betrayed, and had to be arrested, and had to be tried, and had to be crucified. He was so dear to them and so blameless that they could not realize that there were men wicked enough to put him to death.

When he told them of the place he was going to

prepare for them, and said, “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” And then, when he began to talk to them of the Father, “Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us.” Then it was that the Master seemed actually surprised, and we have these words of gentle reproach: “Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?”

We are not surprised that in a certain sense he was amazed at such stupidity, at such obtuseness and want of knowledge. For nearly three years he had been their constant companion. He had walked about with them and talked to them and instructed them in the things concerning the kingdom. He had told them a great many things in the most direct and simple language. He had spoken to them other things in parables. He had taught them also through miracles, thus showing them, in the most practical and forcible way, who he was, what he was and why he came into the world.

The truths he declared were spiritual truths, but it seems to us that, as he must have taught them, they ought to have understood them, and ought to have taken them into their very secret soul

and fed on them as on hidden manna. But here were two of them asking questions which a child ought not to have asked after three years of such schooling under such a Teacher. And so to one of them, with wonderful patience and pity, the Lord said, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" There was no harshness, no sharpness, in the reprimand, but there was what we would call human surprise and mortification. Of course he understood how it was, but to a mere man such spiritual stupidity would have been perfectly amazing and unaccountable.

It seems to us that our Lord's personal character must have been so conspicuous and so transparent that surely his own disciples ought to have known who he was, what he was and therefore what was before him in his mission among men. His mother knew him. John the Baptist knew him. Peter knew him. And all these testified to the fact of his divine mission and commission. But Thomas doubted, Philip did not understand him, and Judas, one of the twelve, must have misread and misunderstood the whole person and work of this divine being who took on him our nature that he might be the Saviour of the lost.

What was the cause of this ignorance, and what

is the cause of that same profound ignorance on our part? What he said to Philip is just as true of many of us who have been taught of him and about him ever since we were old enough to learn anything. There is not a child in our Sunday-schools and churches who has not heard enough to make him wise unto salvation. There is not one in our usual audiences who has not heard more plainly and more distinctly brought out the distinctive truths of the gospel than did these disciples of our Lord and Master. They were Jews, and had to unlearn much that had been taught them before they were ready to take in what was taught them by our Lord.

But we, the grown people and children of to-day, have never known anything but what the Bible teaches as "the way of life." We believe that to be the word of God, and seldom hear anything that conflicts with what is taught there as "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Yes, but much of our Bible reading and much of our gospel hearing is alike unproductive of any special good, because what we read and what we hear is not actually taken into the mind and into the soul. For the time and at the time we are pleased and entertained and lulled into a state of pleasant peacefulness and quiet. But we are like

the man who looks at his natural face in a glass, and goes away forgetting what manner of man he is. There may be some vague, confused notion of what we have read and what we have heard, but, after all, the truth does not always do us good, as it ought to do good to the upright in heart.

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." The most retentive memory is apt to let slip what is heard unless we are very careful to attend closely at the time and with the keenest interest to what is read or spoken.

The main reason why Christ was not better known by them, and is not better known by us, is the want of spiritual insight. They looked at what appeared on the surface, on the outside—at what was apparent to the senses. They saw his miracles and they heard his words, and from these they must have drawn the conclusion that he was a most marvelous man. There were times when they seemed to take in the idea that he was divine. There were many things about him that could not be reconciled with the theory that he was merely a man. Moses and many others in the olden time had wrought miracles, but there was something about this man that was far above and

beyond all that they had ever read about or heard about in the way of tradition. He could still the tempest and raise the dead by a mere word of command. By his own power, and as the result of his own sovereign and supernatural power, all things obeyed him.

But, for all this, there was wanting in his disciples what is wanting in us—a spiritual insight which could look down into his soul and read all the inner spiritual power that was veiled in that perfect human form. “He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” They must have known that after being with him for three years. They must have looked upon him as the very incarnation of all that they had ever heard touching the being and character of God himself.

But was he God? If so, and they believed it, why did Philip say, “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us”? Ah, these were spiritual things that had to be “spiritually discerned.” And their “eyes were holden,” that they could not spiritually grasp the spiritual truths that were wrapped up in the very person of this “Son of God.”

And there is just where the trouble is with us. We are prone to look at the outward appearance, while God looks at the heart, and we naturally

look at that which is external, and not at that which is internal and spiritual.

Take such a text as this: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” etc. There is not an assurance in the Bible that is more familiar than this, nor one freighted with more real comfort to a sorrowing soul. But how is it, and why is it, that we find it so hard to take in all the comfort and strength that such an assurance is intended and calculated to impart? “The things which are seen” are what take up our time and our thoughts, to the exclusion of those “things which are not seen” and which “are eternal.”

Many a Christian man is misunderstood by the people of the world because they cannot look into the spiritual state of such a man. They have no conception of what that man thinks, and of how he feels and how he finds peace and gladness of heart by communing with God. They misread his motives and misunderstand his actions, and many a time look upon his words as an expression of hypocrisy. They really know nothing of the conflict raging in his heart, and how hard it is for him to do right and what is well pleasing to God.

And of course such a man as that, full of the

world and of worldly plans and schemes, cannot appreciate the character and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing in common between them, and on the man's part "there is no beauty in Christ, that he should desire him." But where we have a true Christian friend and companion, the more we see of him and the more we find him like Christ, the more we love him, the more we admire him and the more we aim to be like him, as he is like Christ.

John seems to have had a deeper, truer, more spiritual insight into the character of Christ than any of the twelve, because John was more like him than any of the others. And so he was known as that disciple whom Jesus loved. There was a wonderful oneness, sympathy, harmony, similarity of taste and feeling and of general aspiration between them. He knew him as Philip did not, and so the Lord did not have to rebuke him.

And now the questions come home to us, How long has Christ been with us? How long have we walked in company? How long have we been associated as Saviour and saved, as Redeemer and redeemed, as King and subjects, as Master and disciples? Some of us for many years. Longer than Philip or John or James or Peter when these

words were spoken. Some of us—yes, in a certain sense the most of us—from our childhood. There never was a time when we did not have a knowledge of who he was and what he was, and what he proposed to be to us and to do for us. There never was a time, since we knew anything, when we did not look upon him as a Saviour, and hope and expect to be saved by his precious blood. There never was a time when we did not look upon him as the only Saviour, and when we did not feel that all who are saved are to be saved by him.

And for many years some of us have been trying to walk with him, to live with him, to commune with him. But what do we know of Christ? What have we learned of Christ? What have we found out that we did not know at first? Have we studied more and more deeply and truly? Have we sat at his feet, as Mary did, and listened to what he told us of all those wondrous things that are written in his law? Have we had faith, unquestioning faith, unshaken confidence, in all that he has told us of his wondrous love?

Do we love him more now than when we first believed? And as we have grown in years and in knowledge and experience have we gained a deeper and a more spiritual insight into that “love

of Christ which passeth knowledge"? "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It would be a very sad case, then, if Christ should have to say to us, "Have I been so long time with *you*, and yet hast *thou* not known me?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE OF SORROW.

THERE were two sisters who lived in a little town not far from the city of Jerusalem. They were loving and tender, but they were unlike in character and disposition. One was a busy and bustling housekeeper, full of energy and activity and of zeal about her domestic affairs. The other seemed to care but little for such matters, but her mind seemed to be meditative and full of spiritual thoughts and dreamy speculations. They were both types of sisters who are found in many a family of the present day. Both types were needed then, and both are needed now, and together make up that “unity in diversity” which is so essential to a beautiful home circle.

The practical, hard-working, stirring housekeeper is a complement to the thoughtful, meditative maiden who loves to sit and read and think and muse on those spiritual things which are of vastly more importance than the merely temporal things which must “perish with the using.”

But such characters are apt to come in collision and to bring about a state of discord in the family. They are each apt to go off into an extreme in their respective spheres, and not to have as much sympathy and charity for each other as sisters or brothers should have. The fact is, none of us have as much patience as we ought to have with those who differ with us in our conscientious convictions. Our own way of thinking and acting is apt to seem to us the best, and it is hard for us to keep in mind the fact that brothers or sisters in the family or in the church have as much right to their way of thinking and doing as we have. Nor is it easy for us to grant, even to ourselves, that their way of thinking and doing may be even better than our own.

So it was at Bethany. Martha was busy about the house, but Mary was content and happy to sit down at the feet of the Master and hear him talk. In a certain sense both were right, and God had made them to differ. But Martha was impatient with her sister, and evidently mistook her inquisitive spiritual mood for an indolence that needed rebuke. And hence, in her abrupt and practical way, she came in and said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

Now, here was a good chance for a family explosion. Sisters are not fond of being rebuked in the presence of visitors by another sister, and here was an insinuation that Mary was too selfish and too indolent to help attend to household matters. A word from Mary in the same strain and in the same petulant spirit might have furnished a sufficient provocative to bring about such a scene as some of us have been forced to witness in homes.

But, having "the tongue of the learned," see how quickly and how quietly Jesus put a stop to this rising discord, and sent Martha back to her work with a theme large enough and grand enough to keep her mind busy while her hands were at work : "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Solomon says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath ;" and while this was a reproof, a rebuke, it must have been spoken with such a warm heart and such a gentle voice that there was no sting in it except as such faithful words will always touch an awakened conscience. But it was "a word in season to one who was weary." Insensibly, it may be, Martha had allowed her thoughts to become absorbed

with these merely temporal and domestic affairs. These cares were a burden, and a burden that some one had to bear. The Lord knew that as well as she did, and he did not find fault with the fact that she was "cumbered with much serving." He saw that she was wearied, that she was out of patience and petulant, and half angry with her sister. It was not the work, but the worry, the needless worry, that was chafing her spirit and arousing her temper, and to correct this useless waste of nerve-power, as well as to save her soul from sin, he would gently remind her that there is "one thing needful" for every human being. It was religion, pure and undefiled religion—religious faith, religious thought, religious hope, religious principle—that would help her even in her household matters.

We cannot say that this "word spoken in season" was the cause of her conversion; but, at all events, when we visit her house again she is a very different woman.

Lazarus was dead, and the Master, who had been there so often before, did not come at once when he was sent for. And when he did come, too late to do any good, as they thought, Martha shows the same active, restless, impetuous spirit. Religion does not destroy our natural characteristics, but turns

them into new channels. And so, when the news came at last that he was there, Martha started off without a word to her sister, "but Mary sat still in the house." Being more active and watchful as to outside matters, Martha seems to have heard the good news first, and in haste she went out to greet him. But it was with a word of reproach which she could not repress, and which was not intended as impertinence: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

But, showing how she too had chosen "the good part," as well as Mary, with a sublime faith she added, "But I know"—not "I think" nor "I hope," but "I know"—"that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee."

She may not have had as much faith for herself as she needed, but she did have unbounded faith in his prayers to God for all that he chose to ask of God. And, after all, that is the very essence of prayer. We are not heard for our much speaking nor for our earnest speaking, but when the Lord Jesus takes the case in hand, learns of our wants and takes them to God endorsed by his own mediatorial signature, God will honor the draft, whether it be large or small, for "him the Father heareth always."

“And his grace and power are such,
He can never ask too much.”

But in answer to this most remarkable confession the Lord spoke another “word in season” to this weary soul. “Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.” Oh, what “a word” that was! And what a world of comfort it has been to weary souls ever since!

“If a man die, shall he live again?” was a question which had then been discussed from the days of Job, and has been discussed ever since, and is discussed all over the world at the present day. It was pressed home upon the hearts of these anxious sisters at this time, for it had become a practical question with them. There had just been a burial from that house, and the gloom of death was still resting on that home circle. The brother was out there in the grave, and in a short time the body would be a mass of dust. It was already fast going to decay, and they had been forced to bury it out of their sight. They had been taught to hope and believe that it was not for ever, for Martha was not a Sadducee, and believed in the resurrection of the dead.

And now, to confirm that faith in the doctrine and to make it a matter of personal application, he says, “Thy brother shall rise again.” “Martha

saih unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." And then came that "word" which has been "a word in season to weary souls" ever since :

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Blot out these words from the Bible, and what a blank would be left ! What a fountain of life and grace and peace and comfort they have been to weary, heavy-laden souls ever since ! No longer a matter of dreamy speculation or of wild and uncertain hypothesis ; the Lord of light and life himself has told us of the hereafter, "I am the resurrection and the life." There is no uncertain sound about that. The word is clear and loud as the archangel's trump that shall wake the dead. And it reaches us in these ends of the earth as we weep over our buried dead and wonder whether we shall ever look again upon their faces. It is hard to think that we shall, and yet it would be dreadful not to hope so.

There are some who do not believe it, and who say that all go down together and are lost for ever in a common grave. But it does seem that it would

take more faith not to believe these words of our Lord Jesus than it does to let them confirm what must be the hope, the burning hope, of every human heart. And were you to take away this one bright light, this electric light that shines even in a graveyard, that graveyard would be the darkest place in all this world.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WORD TO MOTHERS.

STRANGE as it may seem to us, there came a time when the Sermon on the Mount had to be put in practice by "Mary, the mother of Jesus." It would seem that she had "left all and followed him." Time and again we find her near to him and far away from the old home at Nazareth. It would seem that Joseph was now dead, and as a widowed mother without a home she was then at Jerusalem. Not one heart in all that surging crowd around the cross had such personal human grief as had Mary the mother, who had to look upon that awful death. To others he was a friend, an instructor, a benefactor, a redeemer. There must have been many there who had oftentimes received tokens of his kindness, and who would feel the deepest anguish at the sight of his agony on the cross. But of all that crowd, she was his mother; and with all the sensitive love of a mother she saw him in that fearful death-grapple. He was her Saviour as well as theirs, but he was also her son. And the fact that

she was a “sinner saved by grace” did not detract from the yearning tenderness of her mother love. The disciples would miss him as their teacher, as their friend and Master, but she would miss him as her son. And now that he was about to leave her, the bitter thought would obtrude itself that in all this world there was not a place that she could call her home.

He might have spoken into existence, even then, a palace worthy of such a mother—the mother, *not* “of God,” but of “the Son of God.” And in such an hour as that he did not forget his mother, but, filial to the last, we have these loving words, which must have been “a word in season” to her weary soul: “When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

It has sometimes seemed that in the rebound from Romanism we Protestants swing too far the other way. While very properly horrified at the idea of offering to Mary that worship which is due to God alone, let us not forget that Mary was a woman; and not only a woman, but a mother; and

not only a mother, but the mother of the most remarkable man that ever lived on earth.

The very fact that she was a woman, a human being, made her liable to all the infirmities of any other mother. She was proud of her son, and never ceased to ponder in her heart what had been told her by the angel at the time of the annunciation. Other mothers may brood over superstitious signs and omens, and, in spite of their better judgment, may be more or less influenced by these things. But she knew that God had sent her a message, and from that message she never lost sight of the fact that this son of hers was the Messiah. The wife of a carpenter, she knew that her son was "The Prince of the house of David," that he was born "King of the Jews."

But now that son of hers, in the most unaccountable way, had been arrested, tried, convicted, condemned and was actually dying—and dying on a cross!

Many a mother has stood by the cradle or the bed on which her child—whether an infant or a grown man or woman—was dying. But dark, strange, mysterious as such a death, and any death, always is, the "mother of Jesus" never expected to see him die, and surely not such a horrible death as that.

He was the “Son of God,” and if Enoch was translated, and Elijah was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire, why could not her son have some grander triumphal entry into that heavenly home which was his by birthright and his by covenant?

But all these motherly dreams were fading, dimly fading, as she stood there, under the shadow of his cross, and watched him dying. “He saved others; himself he could not save;” and though he was the “Son of God,” he could not come down from the cross even at the passionate pleadings of a mother’s love. But even at such a time as that he could not forget that his mother was there. Looking upon John, whom he loved more than all the rest, he entrusted to that beloved disciple his own mother as the priceless legacy of his dying love: “Woman, behold thy son!” “Son, behold thy mother!” And from that time she had a home with the best man on earth.

Surely such a word at such a time, coming from such a heart, ought to be “a word in season” to every stricken mother who, like Rachel, is “weeping for her children, and will not be comforted, because they are not.”

“Joy of the comfortless, light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure,

Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
‘Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot cure.’ ”

There was another striking case, where a word came in season to his own disciples. They had started across the Sea of Galilee. “And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.” We can easily catch the spirit of these men as they looked out upon the waves in the darkness of the night. Not that they were afraid of the storm, for the wind only made it rough enough to enhance the sight of what was soon to startle them. Seafaring men are almost sure to be superstitious; and it is not to be wondered at, for, of all the places in the world for producing strange and fantastic fancies, the sea is best calculated, and especially on a dark night, when you can hear only the roar of the wind and the rushing of the waters.

But while they are peering out into the darkness “they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.” That was a wild dream of Coleridge which led him to write of a phantom ship with a phantom crew drifting through the darkness. But here was a stranger sight than that. “Be it man or angel or goblin damned,” in their affright they cannot tell.

But there was an apparition of a man walking on the water, “and they were afraid.”

The touch or the word of a mother will quiet the fears of a child at midnight. And so that word, “It is I; be not afraid,” soothed and stilled the fears of these anxious disciples in a moment; for they then knew that all was well.

But the word did not stop there, for it has been “a word in season to weary souls” ever since. Many and many a time, when the night was dark and the sea was rough, and mysterious sights and sounds would startle our fears, we have heard that voice and been still. It has come to us like the “All’s well!” of the man at the mast-head, which, caught up by one and another along the deck, brings peace and confidence to all who are on board.

“When waves of trouble round me swell,
My soul is not dismayed;
I hear a voice I know full well:
‘Tis I; be not afraid.’”

God help us all to say that from the heart.

It may be that these words will be read by some who have no part nor lot in such matters. Are there not times in the history of all when you are weary and heavy-laden, and would give all the world to

hear a word which, by the grace of God, might prove to be “a word in season”? Have there not been times, even in the short life of some of the young people, when they would have given anything in reason to be able to throw out one of these anchors and feel sure that it would hold fast in the most furious storm? Some of us have lived long enough to be ready to endorse the words, wrung out from the breaking heart of a mother, “There is nothing in this world worth living for but religion.” That was what she said, and what every one of us will feel and say one of these days.

You may not have lived long enough to see “vanity of vanities” painted upon the walls, or to hear it whispered amid the patterning footfalls of the merriest dancers. But the time will come—and it may come soon—when you will realize the hollowness, the emptiness, of all that is “without God and without hope in the world.”

Not that we would plant one thorn in your pillow, or cast one shadow on your joyous soul, or wither one flower that blooms along your pathway. But “your way is dark and leads to hell.” In spite of all the artificial lights that flash and gleam around you, “your way is dark.” Yes, dark as Egypt was when God’s frown shut off the sunlight and left “a

darkness that could be felt.” And it “leads to hell”! There is such a place. Men may try not to think about it, and try not to believe it, but, in spite of all sceptical doubts and efforts to suppress the truth, our own hearts confirm these words of the Bible: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”

Think of the Prodigal: “And he began to be in want.” What then? “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” These were sad thoughts for that young profligate. But he had come to himself, and “Come home! come home!” had been ringing, not in his ears, but in his conscience and in his heart. And when he heard these words, he said like a man, like a madman whose madness is gone, “I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” That was the manliest thing that young man had ever said. And when he acted on the gracious impulse of the moment, he showed that he was now what he never had been before—worthy to be called his father’s son.

“Come home ! come home !
You are weary at heart,
For the way has been dark,
And so lonely and wild.
O prodigal child,
Come home ! oh, come home !

“Come home ! come home !
For we watch and we wait,
And we stand at the gate,
While the shadows are piled.
O prodigal child,
Come home ! oh, come home !”

CHAPTER IX.

NOT A WORD, BUT A LOOK.

“AND about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth, this fellow also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” “And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.” “And the *Lord turned and looked upon Peter.*” That was all. He did not speak a word, but just turned his pitying eyes upon him and looked a rebuke which mere language could not have expressed.

In that look there must have been a mingled expression of tenderness and sympathy and sorrow. But it was also intended as a severe rebuke. It rebuked his self-reliance. It rebuked his impetuosity. It rebuked his cowardice. It rebuked his treachery. It rebuked him for a willful falsehood told to shield himself from danger. Yes, there was a terrible rebuke in that silent look, that spoke to his secret soul and stirred up tears of penitence that were bitter in their reproaches against him.

“He went out and wept bitterly.” What must have been his feelings as he sat there alone, weeping, in the dark and chilly night ! How keen must have been the reproaches of conscience ! How deep his self-abasement ! How vile and miserable and ungrateful he must have felt as he thought of that mild but withering glance of wounded affection ! It was a time never to be forgotten, for that was godly sorrow working “a repentance that needed not to be repented of.”

There is one ordinance of the Lord’s house where this scene ought always to come back to us—viz. “The Lord’s Supper.” It is a scene of peculiar and solemn interest to all, whether in the Church or not. In it we are to “celebrate the Lord’s death until he comes.” In that sweet and awful place “Jesus is evidently set forth crucified among us.” We are to “do this in remembrance of him.” It is “a sign and seal” of our faith in him. It is a renewed pledge of our allegiance to him, a visible manifestation of our love for him and a promise on our part to serve and obey him.

In such an ordinance, then, we find a most suitable place to testify our allegiance to him ; and if not, it is there that “*a denial*” stands out distinct and conspicuous. It is there that his true disciples are

called upon to assert their devotion, and it is there that we may, by sin and impenitence, deny that we know the man. He is always present in such a scene—not to be tried before Pilate or a Jewish high priest, but to speak words of comfort to his saints. He is there to encourage the faint-hearted, to strengthen the weak, to cheer the disconsolate, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn.

He is there, too, to test our love, to try our devotion, to measure our improvement, to excite our devotions, to increase our consecration. But he is there also to look upon his enemies, to watch his despisers, to condemn his betrayers, to rebuke, with a mild look of terrible reproach, those who in any way deny him.

And could we see, as Peter did, that tender but reproachful look, our hearts would throb with silent sorrow, our heads would sink in shame, our lips would tremble with conscious guilt, our eyes would fill with tears and we should go out and weep bitterly.

In what is known as the Passover Psalm (the 116th) the Psalmist says: "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the

courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord." This is just what we all ought to say and to do in a communion service. But have we done it?

Do you remember that time when you were lying upon a bed of illness and, you thought, a bed of death? And as the death damp seemed to be gathering upon your brow and the death chill began to settle on your heart, do you remember how you prayed for mercy? Do you remember how you made a solemn vow that if God would raise you up you would gladly give your heart to Jesus and prepare for death and the judgment?

Where are all those vows? Have you kept them? No; they have been broken and are almost forgotten, and you are still treading the broad and beaten path that leadeth to destruction. You are "denying the Lord" that has brought you back from the very borders of the pit.

Do you remember that dark, dismal day when you stood by the death-bed of some one dear to you as your own life? And, as a mist came over your eyes and a cloud came over your soul, do you remember those farewell words that were spoken, and that dying injunction, "Meet me in heaven"? Do you remember that, with a broken heart, you an-

swered, "By the help of God, I will"? God saw your heart then, and heard that solemn vow, and recorded it in his "book of remembrance." But have you kept it? Alas! no. You are living in such a way as to make that a final farewell. You deny the very Saviour who took that dying saint to heaven. Oh, the melting gaze of Jesus! How it must burn into your very soul as that scene comes back to you through the misty haze of the past!

Do you remember how, amid the stirring scenes of a revival, your heart was moved to its deepest depths, and how it sank within you and how your conscience upbraided you as all your sins were set in order before you? Do you remember how vile you seemed to be, how miserable you felt, how wicked and depraved your heart appeared, in the light of God's truth? Do you remember how you wept over your sins, how you prayed for pardon, how hard you tried to be a Christian?

You feel now that you did not try in the right way. You see that you did not go at once to Jesus and cast all your burden on the Lord. You know that you were trying to make a righteousness of your own, while God says, "All your righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

But what has become of all those serious thoughts and feelings? Do you ever have them now? No; they are all gone, and you are just as careless and thoughtless as you ever were before. You seldom think about religion now, and never, it may be, of personal piety. But you were once almost persuaded to be a Christian; "not far from the kingdom of God." Like the young ruler who came running to Christ, there may have been something so fascinating about you that Jesus loved you.

But what must be his feelings now? How must he regard you? He said to you then, "One thing thou lackest," and you too "went away sorrowful" because there was some darling lust you were not willing to give up for the sake of your soul. But now he turns his pitying eyes upon you as he sees that you still deny him and say by your conduct, "I know not the man."

There is another class, however, who sometimes "deny the Master" on a communion occasion. They are members of the church, but for various reasons they will not take part in this solemn ordinance. Some refuse because they do not think they are as spiritually minded as they ought to be. This is just like sinners who will not come to

Jesus because they feel unworthy to be received. It is like a hungry man not eating because he is hungry, or a thirsty man not drinking because he is thirsty.

You feel that you are a very poor Christian, that you are worldly-minded, that you are almost a reproach to the cause of Christ. Yes, you are not worthy to come to the Lord's table. You have lived too much for the world, have been too much engaged in the things of time and sense, have thought too little about Christ and holy things, and because of these things you are going to deny the Lord before the world.

You profess to believe that "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin," but by your actions you seem to deny this great fundamental doctrine. So far as your sins and your personal unworthiness are concerned, you are right. We all ought to feel that in and of ourselves we have no right to commune. It is only those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness that can come to the Lord's Table and be filled. It is because we have these feelings of contrition and humility that Christ invites us to come. Here we are to enlarge our hearts, to increase our faith, to deepen our piety. There, at his table, we

are to get new supplies of grace, so as to renew our strength.

Do not let these feelings keep you away, then, for these are the very feelings that ought to bring you near to Jesus. He loves to show himself to just such humble and penitent souls as yours. And if you "deny him," he will turn his melting eyes of reproachful tenderness upon you. He will upbraid you for your unbelief. He will upbraid you for that self-righteous spirit which would lead you to trust to your own worthiness as a ground of acceptance. Then when you come back to him in penitence he will welcome you with great gladness.

Feel just as humble, just as poor, just as unworthy as you please; the more of these feelings you have, with the greater alacrity should you come to the table of the Lord. There, "under the shadow of his cross," you will find "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Jesus will no longer fix his eyes on you in that reproachful way, but God will smile upon you. The Master will look upon you with that same sweet compassion with which he regarded "that disciple whom he loved." He will draw you to

his bosom as he did that favored one at the institution of the feast, and then you will come away from that table *nearer to God, nearer to Christ and nearer to heaven.*

“Beware of Peter’s word,
Nor confidently say,
‘I never will deny my Lord,’
But, ‘Grant I never may.’”

CHAPTER X.

A WORD TO THE PENITENT.

OUR Lord was crucified, dead and buried. But on Sunday morning the women had come very early to the grave, and, to their surprise, the stone was rolled away and the body was gone. There sat two angels clothed in long white garments, and the women were affrighted. But one of the angels “saith unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified; he is risen; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him.”

That was a plain statement of facts, for the women saw and heard these things, and, being wide awake, they felt so sure of what was said that they were affrighted. And among the strangest words spoken by the angel were these: “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”

“Tell his disciples and Peter.” Tell them all, but be sure and tell Peter. Give him a special

message. Who was Peter, and why was this special message sent by the risen Lord and Master to such a man?

Peter was the disciple who had made himself more conspicuous than any of the others except Judas Iscariot; and he, having betrayed Christ, had hanged himself and gone "to his own place." Peter was the man who, with a self-conscious impulse, had contradicted the Master when he told them that all the disciples would forsake him. He it was who said, "Though all the world deny thee, yet will not I deny thee." He it was to whom the Saviour said at the time, "Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter was the man who confronted the mob and cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest.

But after this Peter was among those who forsook him and fled. And after this Peter was the one who denied three times, and at last cursed and swore that he knew not the man. Peter was the man who heard the cock crow and remembered the words of Jesus, and saw him as he turned and looked at him at that strange signal.

And when he saw and felt that searching, penetrating gaze, it was Peter who "went out and wept bitterly." A poor, broken-hearted, self-accused, self-convicted culprit, he could not stand that reproachful gaze, and so he went out into the darkness and wept as if his heart would break.

When a man has passed through such a contradictory experience as that, it is not strange that he felt uncertain as to how the risen Lord would look upon him. Peter must have felt that he had forfeited all Christ's respect and esteem, and was totally unworthy of his confidence and love. It would not have been strange had the Lord disowned and disinherited him for ever. Had sudden vengeance seized him, it would have been as deserved as the wrath that fell upon Ananias and Sapphira.

Ah ! Peter knew Christ too well for that. He had known him for three years, and had felt the magic spell of his godly walk and conversation during all these years. Peter had been rebuked before, and his restive and impetuous soul had often felt the witchery of those pensive eyes and the music of that plaintive voice. He could not conceive of Jesus as any one else than the warm,

loving, tender-hearted friend who had been with him through all these years that were gone.

And, besides, hard, impetuous, wicked and profane as Peter knew he had been, there was also a consciousness of the deepest and heartiest repentance. That awful scene of the denial could never be blotted from his memory. It was branded there as by heated iron, and he knew that nothing could ever obliterate it.

But the blood that was shed by the mob, and the blood that was shed by the crown of thorns, and the blood that was shed on the cross—this blood was all shed to blot out such a fearful sin as that. And with a true, heart-broken penitence Peter was ready to trust to the pardon of One who had pardoned him so often before. He was ready to trust in One who had proved himself so worthy of his trust ever since he had known him and loved him.

But, while Peter may have felt all this, how are we to account for that special mark of love which he was now to receive from his risen Lord? Why did the angel not say, “Go your way, tell his disciples and John that he goeth before you into Galilee”? John was the first to recognize Jesus on the seashore when he appeared to the disciples.

John seems to have been more like him than any of the others, and he was emphatically "that disciple whom Jesus loved."

Ah, yes! But John would not need any such message to bring reassurance to him. John had never denied the Master, and he knew beyond all doubt that the Lord had loved him to the end, and so needed no further confirmation. But Peter did, and the Lord knew how he had gone out and wept, in bitterness of soul, at the remembrance of his base ingratitude and his fearful sin. And to reassure him and to confirm and re-establish his waning, flickering faith, he sent him this special message by the mouth of an angel.

The fact is, the gospel is founded on the ideas that are embodied in the parables of "The Lost Piece of Money," "The Lost Sheep" and "The Prodigal Son." In all these there is a sharp and striking contrast between what was lost and what was not lost. The woman who had lost one piece left the nine. The shepherd who had lost one sheep left the ninety and nine. The father who had lost one son as a prodigal was aware of the fact that the elder son was still at home, but the one who was an exile, a prodigal and an outcast cost him more care and more anxiety, and he

seemed to be more rejoiced at the return of the renegade than he had ever been at the dutiful conduct of the one who stayed at home. The gospel is a remedy. “The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “Where sin abounded, there did grace much more abound.” These other disciples had all acted badly, but Peter had acted worse than all the other ten put together. They had forsaken Christ in the terror and confusion of his arrest, but Peter had “denied him with an oath” after the loudest professions of love and loyalty.

This is true in pastoral life. Those members who are blameless and circumspect we can afford to leave to their sense of duty and to their own love for Christ and his Church. But those who are unstable as water, constantly fluctuating between right and wrong, falling and then rising again, backsliding and recovering themselves, repenting and then sinning again—these are the ones who demand and receive more care, more thought, more anxiety and more earnest and importunate prayer than all the rest of them put together.

Oh, if God’s people would only do what they know is right, and never do what they fear may

be wrong! If they would but keep in the narrow way, would but stay in the fold, would only keep from getting lost, what a good, peaceful, pleasant time Christian pastors would have!

No lost piece of money to look for, no wandering sheep to be hunting after, no prodigal, gone away to a vicious life, for us to be watching for, praying for and waiting for until he gets back home! No goats among the sheep! No tares among the wheat! No sowing of wild oats, for a harvest of sorrow to be reaped by and by! No Judas to betray the Master, and no Peter to deny him, but all as one family serving him in mutual love on earth, at last to meet together and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God for ever!

The Lord had a great work for Peter to do, and he was preparing him for that work. Peter had always been a quick, impulsive, impetuous man, and when that kind of a man is really and truly changed by God's grace, he is apt to become one of the most useful and one of the most resolute defenders of the faith. Before his denial he had been truly regenerated, and when he was converted he did strengthen his brethren.

The Lord knew that such would be the case,

and hence he sent him this tender message to assure him that he had not forgotten him. Christ wanted to assure his servant that he had freely forgiven him, and that he would never leave nor forsake him in the future.

It must have surprised Peter, and even astounded him. But it would be a very strong proof of his Master's unchanging and unchangeable love. It would arouse all the manly graces of Peter's renewed heart. It would kindle afresh all that zeal and devotion that had gone into a sudden eclipse. It would start him forth as a more devoted friend and follower of Christ than he had even been before. It would cause him to have a stronger faith than he had in his loyallest days in the past. It would inspire him with a more earnest purpose of heart than had ever moved him in bygone days to devote all his ransomed powers to the spread of that gospel which had saved him from such a grievous fall.

That hour of darkness when "he went out and wept bitterly" was the turning-point in Peter's apostolic life. Before that he had been "born again," but that night and that scene were to him like the night which Jacob spent "wrestling with the angel of the covenant," for from that

day forward Peter seemed to have new power with God, and was able, as a “prince with God,” to prevail over all the enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

And when they did meet in Galilee, to the question, three times asked, he could look into that Master’s eye and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” May God give us all that grace which shall enable us to say the same !



P A R T V.

LOVE-MESSAGES FROM PAUL.



LOVE-MESSAGES FROM PAUL.

ROMANS, CHAPTER 16.

THE best way, and, I may say, the only proper way, to read Paul's Epistles is to read the whole of one epistle at a sitting. If you have never tried it, you will be surprised at your experience in that line. There is first an exordium, then the discussion of some great doctrine or doctrines, and then the personal application of the practical lessons to be deduced.

In this "Epistle to the Romans" Paul discusses almost all the cardinal doctrines of redemption, justification, sanctification, predestination, election, perseverance of the saints, and so on. Then come some of the most wholesome practical lessons that can be impressed on the human conscience and heart.

But after getting through with all these Paul concludes with the words of salutation which are contained in the sixteenth chapter. When we read them over we cannot help wondering why it was

that such a man as Paul should have thought of so many persons at the close of such a discussion, and, stranger still, why it was that the Holy Ghost should have caused him or allowed him to write out all these messages as a part of the Bible itself.

He might have sent these salutations by word of mouth, or he might have written them on a separate piece of parchment. But what was the use of making them a part of the Bible? Who knows or cares about Phebe or Priscilla and Aquila or Narcissus or Andronicus and Junia or Tryphena and Tryphosa? Some of them are mentioned in other places, but most of them are not. And if the Bible does not tell us the name of Lot's wife, or the name of Job's wife, or the name of the Syro-Phoenician woman, why should it tell us the names of all these men and women who had been the personal friends and acquaintances of the apostle Paul?

There must have been thousands of men and women who had met him and entertained him in the different places where he had preached the gospel and organized churches. When at Miletus he "sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church," but their names are not recorded. Why

is it, then, that these persons, thirty-five in all, are mentioned by name in this one chapter?

There must have been some object in this, for in writing the Bible God would not put there what was redundant. And hence we may rest assured that there was, that there must have been, a good reason for this list of names.

I. There was something about each one of them which endeared these persons to Paul, because they had helped him in his Christian and apostolic work. Some had helped in one way and some in another, but all had done something to advance the work of saving souls.

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.” “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus; who have for my life laid down their own necks” (*i. e.* risked their own lives somewhere, but he does not say where). These are mentioned in four different places in the Bible. “Likewise, greet the church that is in their house,” meaning either that this was a very peculiar and prominent Christian family, or that a small church, or what was afterward called a “conventicle,” met regularly for worship in the house of these good people.

"Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us." "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Where they had been imprisoned with him we cannot tell. Paul was frequently in prison—tradition says seven times—but where it was and when it was that these friends had shared his imprisonment he does not tell us. It was enough to let the brethren at Rome know that there were two of his brethren there who, for the sake of the gospel, had been in prison for Christ, and could therefore be trusted when the trial came.

And thus we might take up one case after another, and we would find that all these personal messages are based on some good deeds of the persons, which showed their love not only for Paul, but for Paul's Master, and for the Church which Paul and the Master both loved more than they did their own lives. Some were Greeks, and some were Romans and some were Jews; some were men and some were women; some had done one thing and some had done another to show that they loved Christ, and that they loved Paul for Christ's sake. And just as we have in the eleventh

chapter of Hebrews what has been called “a muster-roll of Old Testament saints” who were remarkable for their faith, so here we have a muster-roll of Paul’s personal friends who had been “fellow Helpers to the truth.” They were not apostles, and if any of them were elders or deacons, Paul does not tell us the fact. But they were good men and good women who had helped him in his work, and who he knew could be relied on, as true as steel, whenever the time might come that demanded the stuff that martyrs are made of.

Some of them were tent-makers, as he was, and they had worked with him at the same trade while he was preaching the gospel. Some of them had entertained him as their guest at their own old homes. Some of them had suffered with him, and had actually risked their own lives in defence of and for the sake of the gospel.

It is more than probable that most of them had been converted under Paul’s preaching; but if so, unlike many of our modern evangelists, he says nothing about that. He is talking about how he loved them for their work’s sake; how he felt grateful to them for all the help they had rendered in his great work, where the fields were white unto the harvest and the laborers were few.

It was not Paul, but Paul's Master as personified in Paul, who was telling these good men and women how he looked upon them, how he had been cared for, how he had been loved, how he had been treated, how he had been helped, in all that they had done and suffered along with Paul. Paul was but a mouthpiece for the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Tertius was an amanuensis for Paul when he was writing this epistle. Paul did not write much himself, but only dictated what others wrote; and he only dictated as the Spirit gave him utterance and what the Spirit told him to write.

If one of those original manuscripts could be found, the body of it would not be in Paul's handwriting; but at the close he took the pen or stylus and, as he says, "with mine own hand" he added the benediction and thus authenticated the whole. In one of these epistles, that to the Galatians, he says, as if it were known to be an unusual thing, "See with how large letters I have written unto you with mine own hand."

But, whether written by Paul or written by a scribe, the epistles were always dictated by Paul and as "he was moved by the Holy Ghost." So, when we read over these names of good men and

good women, and the record of some kindly deed done to the apostle, we can "read between the lines," in a still clearer and more luminous handwriting, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

II. In the light of that grand truth, what a volume is compressed into each of these sentences of commendation! Let us look at a few of these, as types of all the rest.

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." What more touching epitaph could Phebe have asked for if she had known that Paul, and the God of Paul, would write that upon her tombstone—better still, upon a page of the Bible! Nobody knows, and nobody cares, where Phebe was buried. Her body turned to ashes eighteen hundred years ago, and if there ever was a marble slab to mark the grave at Cenchrea or at Rome, there may have been a thousand Phebes since then. But God knows, the Lord Jesus knows, and I think Paul in heaven knows too, the Phebe he meant when God told him to say that about Phebe when he was closing up his Epistle to the Romans.

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church.” Oh, how the church people at Rome, when they met this good woman and read what Paul said about her, must have felt toward a woman who could stir the great heart of that strong but loving apostle of whom they had heard so much! And even when we sit down now and slowly read over the words, “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church,” how sweet and holy and loving and tender is the face that greets us, and what a warm welcome each of us would give her to our churches and our homes, were Phebe, Paul’s sister and ours, and sister of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make her appearance in our midst after having received such words of commendation to us from Paul!

“A servant of the church.” Whether a maiden lady, a married woman or a widow he does not choose to tell, nor does it matter. She was “a servant of the church”—not its mistress, but its servant; not anxious to rule it, but ready to be ruled by it. Not too proud to be a servant, not too busy at home to give any time to it, not a woman of fashion, a “society woman,” a “busy-body with other people’s matters” or a gadder-

about or a stay-at-home when the church was at work or at worship, but “a servant of the church.”

She may have been a poor woman, or she may have been a rich woman; she may have had a house full of children, or she may have had none; she may have been a Christian teacher, or she may have been a woman of elegant leisure as the world goes, but she was “a servant of the church,” and there is not a woman, young or old, married or single, who does not know just what Paul meant when he wrote those words; and there is not one who does not know whether, if Paul were here and acquainted with you as he was with Phebe, he would write that of you.

“A servant of the church.” Some think she was a deaconess. But if she was, she must have made herself so useful that she was chosen to the office on the ground of merit. If they had a “sewing-circle,” she was a member of that, as Dorcas was at Joppa. If they had had what we now call a Sunday-school, or what they called a class of catechumens or young converts, Phebe no doubt was one of the teachers. When strangers moved to Cenchrea, Phebe could find time to visit them and invite them to come to church, and ask the other women to call to see them. If anybody

was sick or in trouble or needed a word of sympathy or some little help, Phebe was ready to give the required help, or else to get it from those who were able and willing to grant it. She was a good woman, and she was a servant of the church to which she belonged. And as a pastor of thirty years' experience, I am not surprised that Paul wrote so kindly of Phebe when this good sister was about to visit Rome.

It is my custom, as it is that of many others, when the Session dismisses a member, to write a few words of commendation as strong and complimentary as I can, and sign it as pastor. But we pastors always dislike to write such a letter for a Phebe, because we need such helpers in our own churches. And yet many of us have written words just as true and just as commendatory of some whose going from us was a great loss, and whose accession was a great gain to the other churches to whose care we dismissed them.

What kind of a letter would conscience constrain your pastor to write about you if God were to transfer your lot to some other church? Could he write as lovingly and as tenderly of you as Paul did of Phebe? And if not, why not? Are you only a woman? So was Phebe. Are

you not a very brilliant woman? Paul does not commend Phebe on account of her remarkable brilliancy. Are you not a rich woman? I have no idea that Phebe was. She was going to Rome on some kind of business, and Paul writes, "That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also." She has been very kind and generous to others, and to me as an apostle, and because she is a good woman, and "the servant of the church at Cenchrea," I want you to receive her kindly and treat her kindly and help her all you can, not merely for her own sake, but for the sake of our common Lord and Master.

"Salute Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus." It may have been merely an act of courtesy to write the wife's name first, or it may be that, in thinking about them and sending his apostolic greeting in this place, Priscilla seemed to him to have been more of a helper in Christ Jesus than Aquila had been. Such is sometimes the case, and while officially "the husband is the head of the wife" and of the house, and really ought to be religiously, it is often the other

way. "The church that is in their house" was what Paul was thinking of, and while Aquila was a Christian, it may have been in their case, as it is in so many cases now, that the wife had learned to "show more piety at home" than the husband.

Paul had frequently been with them. He seems to have met them first at Corinth. At that time, by an edict of Claudius, they had been exiled from Rome because they were Jews. Here, as tent-makers, they worked together while Paul also preached. Then they met again at Ephesus, and while Paul had gone to Galatia and Phrygia there came along a man named Apollos, who was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures." He was a Jew, born in Alexandria, but he seems to have progressed in gospel knowledge no further than "John's baptism."

When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, and saw where the trouble was, they took him home "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." And the next account of him was that he was in Achaia, and these words describe the radical and marvelous change that had come about: "For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that

Jesus was the Christ.” This is one reason why Canon Farrar thinks Apollos was the author of the “Epistle to the Hebrews.”

Be that as it may, Apollos became such a favorite at Corinth that Paul had to write, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”

Here, then, was a man who actually became a popular rival to Paul himself, and yet that man had learned the gospel in that little theological seminary taught by Aquila and Priscilla in their own house at Ephesus. No wonder that now, when this pious couple had gone back to Rome and started “a church in their house” there, Paul should send them such a loving message as this: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

And now let me ask you, How about that “church in the house” so far as your home is concerned? Is the husband a member? Is the wife a member? Are all the children who are

old enough members? Is there family worship and Bible reading and study, and are all the rules and regulations based on Christian principles? Is the whole atmosphere of the home distinctly religious? Is there such an air of piety pervading all the social home life as would make that home such a place that Paul would love to stay there? Is it like the home at Bethany where our Lord was so glad to find a resting-place, and where Martha as well as Mary was always glad to see him? Is your knowledge of the Bible such that you could take another Apollos, a converted Jew, to your own home, and throw such a flood of light on the plan of redemption as to send him forth qualified to show that Jesus was the Christ?

That was just what was done by Aquila and Priscilla; and surely our homes in such an age and such a land as this, with Bibles and Sunday-school periodicals and religious papers and books all over the house, ought to be "a church in the house." And we ought to be as well able to lead a poor, unconverted man into the light and liberty of the truth, "the truth that can make him free," as were these poor tent-makers who had lived and worked and taught in the city of Ephesus.

Thus might we go on from one to another of all whom Paul calls by name, and we would find that there was something in the case of each one which made the person dear to the Apostle. Such terms as these are scattered through the chapter: "My beloved in the Lord;" "our helpers in Christ;" "approved in Christ;" "which labored much in the Lord;" "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine"—some old mother in Israel who had been a kind of mother to Paul as well as to her own son.

And thus, with a warm and grateful remembrance, he calls up these old friends and comrades who had stood by him and bravely and nobly fought with him in those old battles which he could never forget.

It was not always thus, for in writing to Timothy he says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." And in another place he says, "Alexander, the coppersmith, did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works." Paul had not the heart to do more himself, but with a sad and sorrowful remembrance he was willing to trust God with that retributive justice which belongs not to men, but to God himself, and he felt sure that God would attend

to that matter a great deal better than he could himself.

But while he could not feel resentment at personal wrongs, in this chapter he seems to recall the names and deeds of many who had befriended and helped him and stood by him in the various places where they had “labored together in the gospel.” And so, after hoping that they would be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil,” he says, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

These things were for our instruction. What practical lessons are to be drawn from these love-messages of Paul?

(a) We are all making our mark on the Church and on the age in which we now live, as we have already done in the past.

When a pastor leaves one church to take charge of another, it is delightful to him to hear kind words spoken of those who have gone before him. Whatever errors these predecessors had committed seem to be forgotten or buried in their graves, and only the loving words and faithful warnings and blameless lives they lived seem to come back to the memory of those with whom their “memory is precious.”

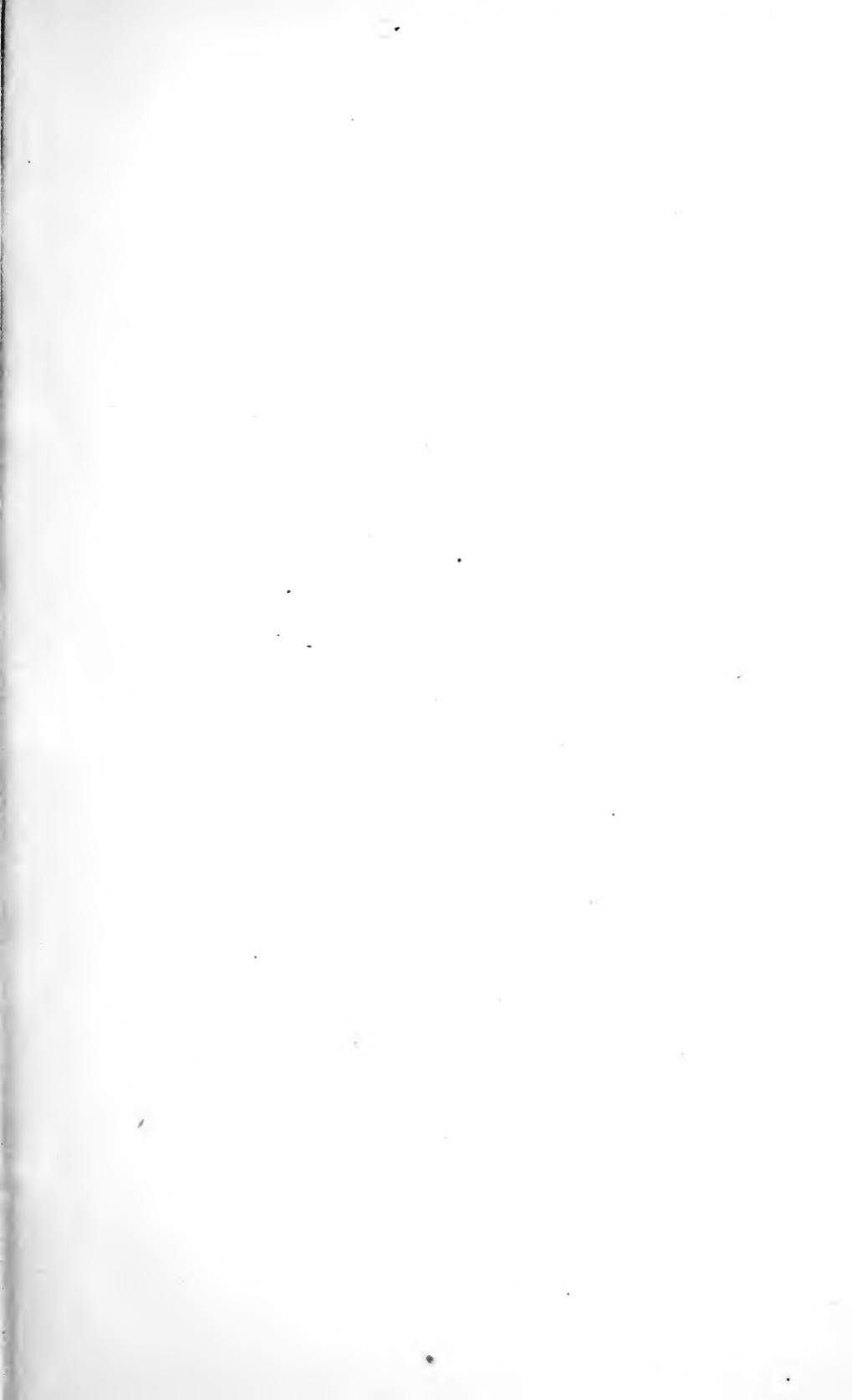
By and by your pastor will be gone too—it may be to some other field of labor, it may be to his final rest. If he is a fearless and faithful watchman, he will be content and satisfied if to his successor you can say, "He was honest, sincere and conscientious in what he preached. Even when his words blistered and burned, under it all he was watching for souls, as one who knew that he must give account." No one can deny that Paul was such a man; and may God grant unto all of us who preach the gospel the spirit of Paul!

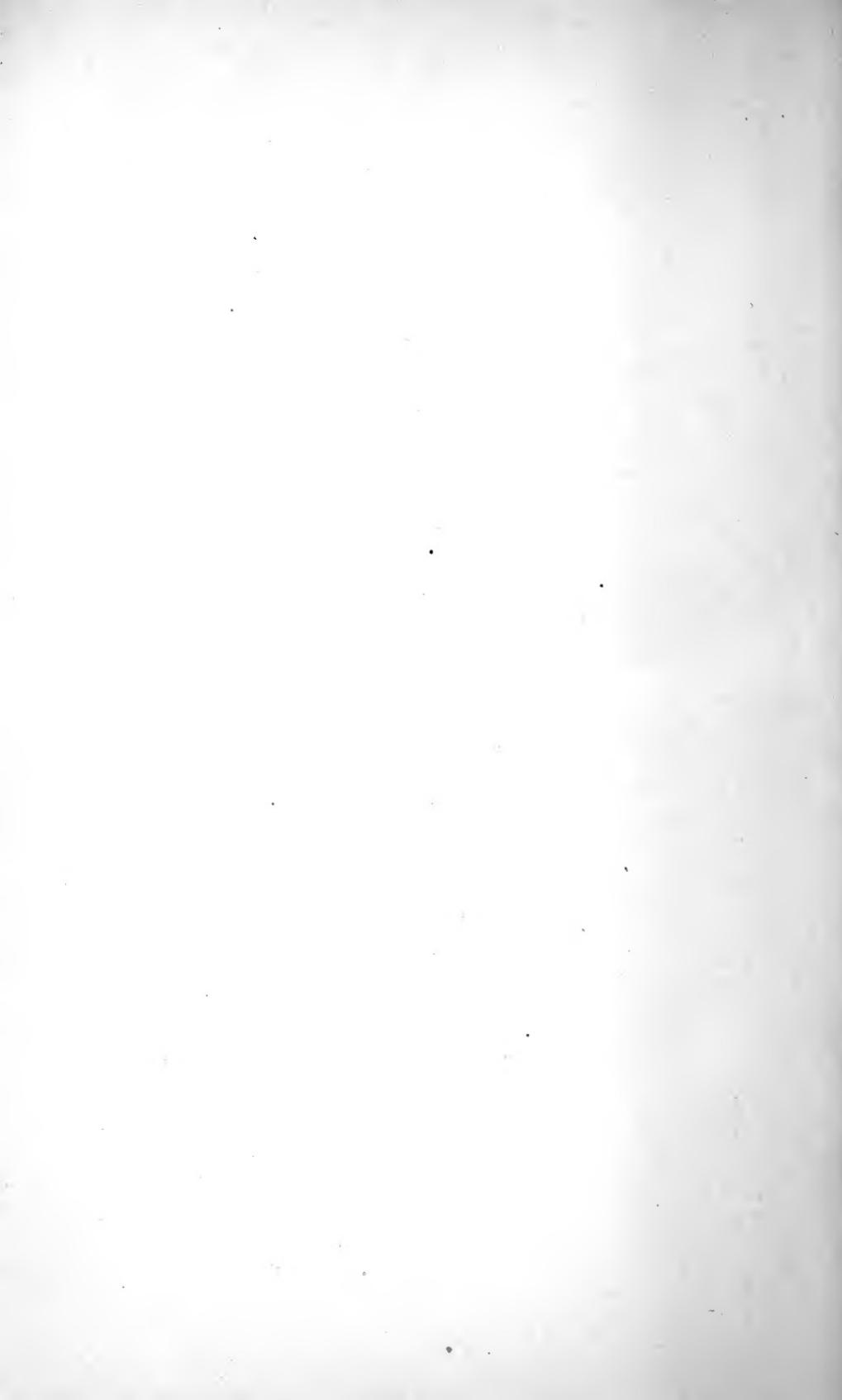
(b) Sometimes in our travels we old pastors meet with members of some church that we have served. They greet us with a loving smile, and make us feel at home wherever they may now have a home. And as we sit and talk of old times, one would be surprised to know how accurately the character of all the prominent members of one's old church have been read and known. The bad as well as the good are known; and while mention may be made of the bad, it is apt to be the case that among the good the words and works of those who were famous for piety and gentleness and kindness and liberality and love are what serve to embalm the memory of the living even while they are still alive.

So, one by one, as we pastors and people are scattered, as these saints then at Rome had been ; or when, one by one, as they were at last, and we shall be at last, we are “gathered to our fathers,” what will some man as good as Paul, though not as great, say of us, each one of us, as he thinks of what we were and of what we did in the cause of our common Lord and Master? How will the church record read, and how will the “Book of God’s remembrance” read, when the last word and the last act of our mortal life has been recorded?

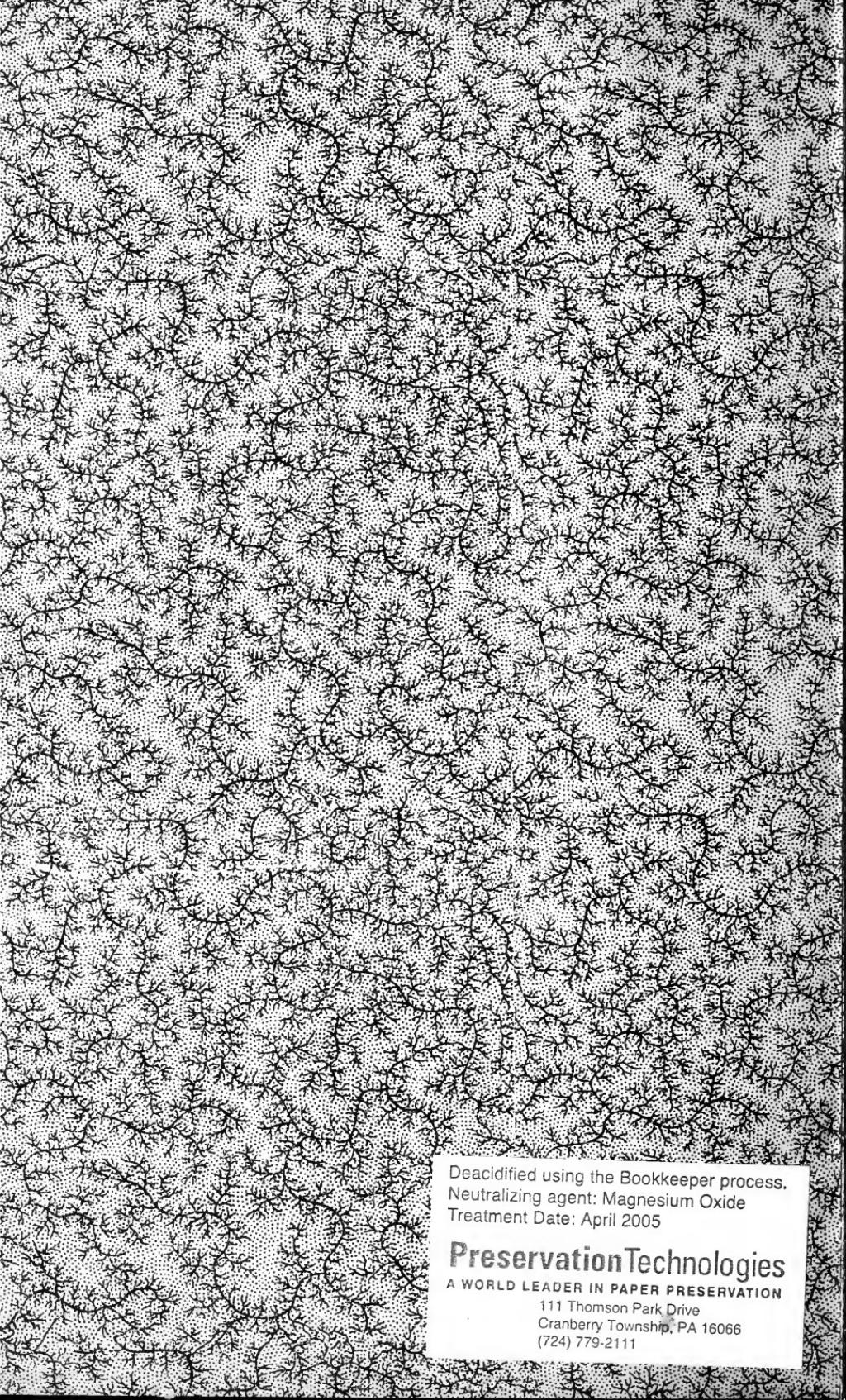
Can we all say to-day what Dr. Guthrie used as a daily motto :

“I live for those who love me,
For those who know me true,
For the heaven that smiles above me,
And awaits my coming too ;
For the cause that lacks assistance,
For the wrongs that need resistance,
For the future in the distance,
And the good that I can do” ?





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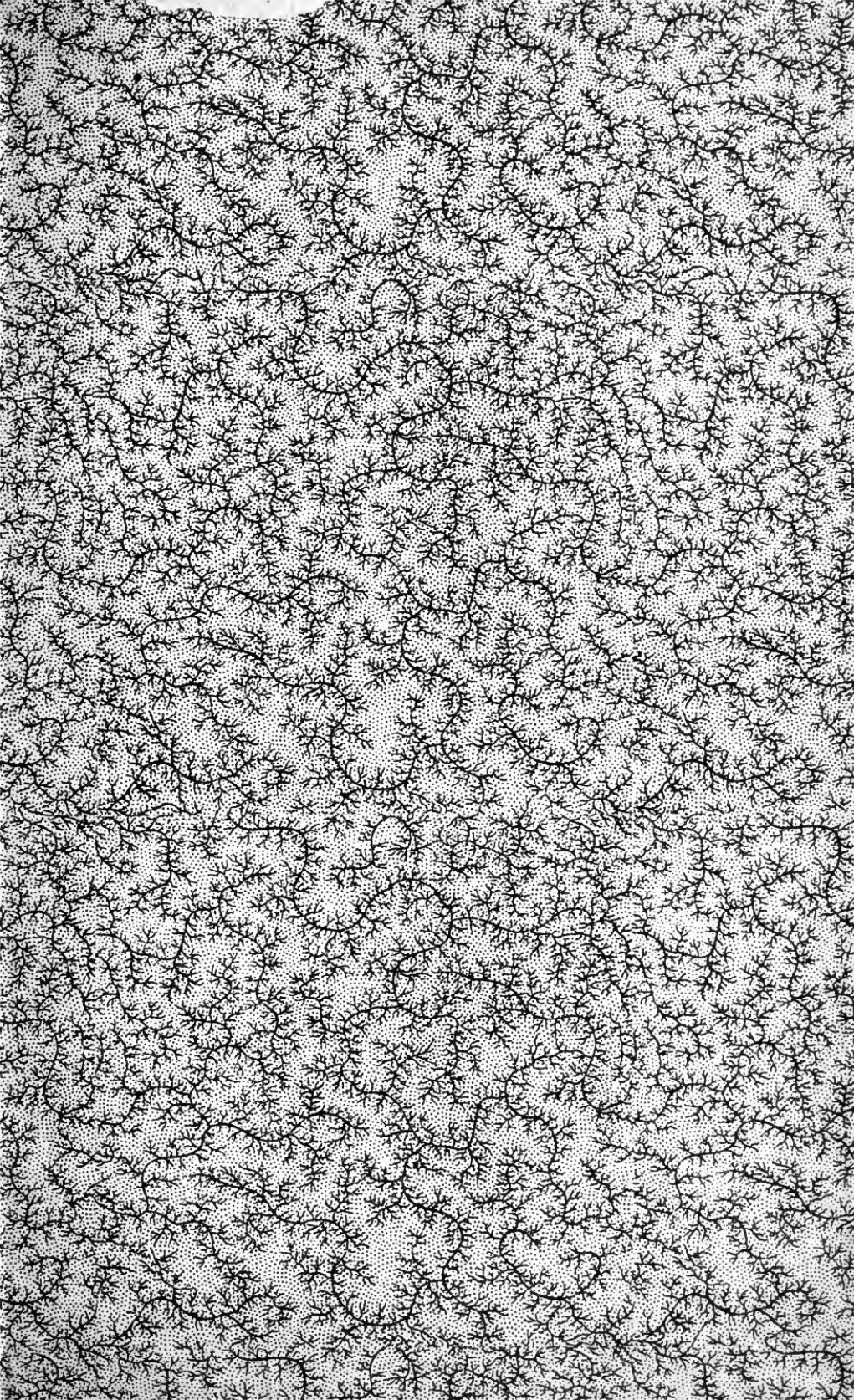


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